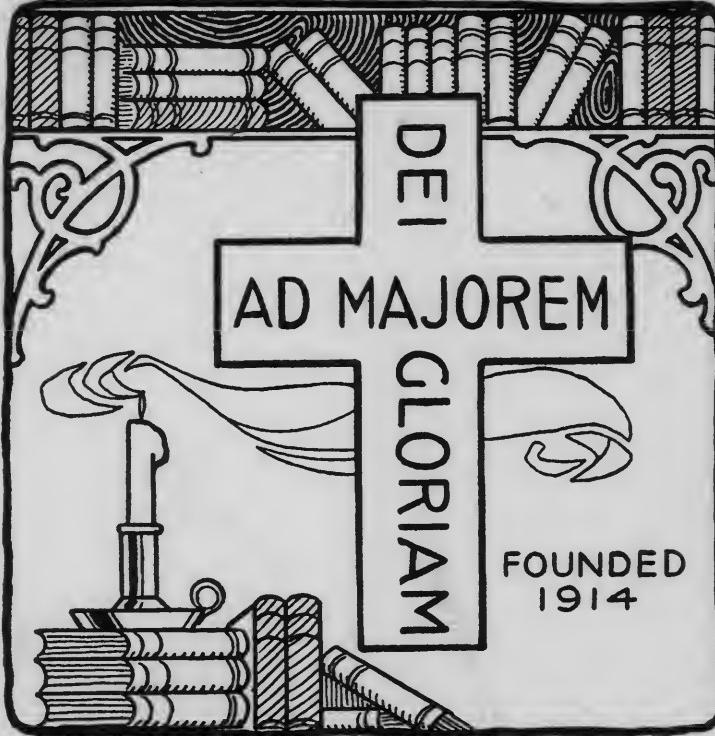


THREE YEARS IN CENTRAL LONDON

EDWARD SMITH

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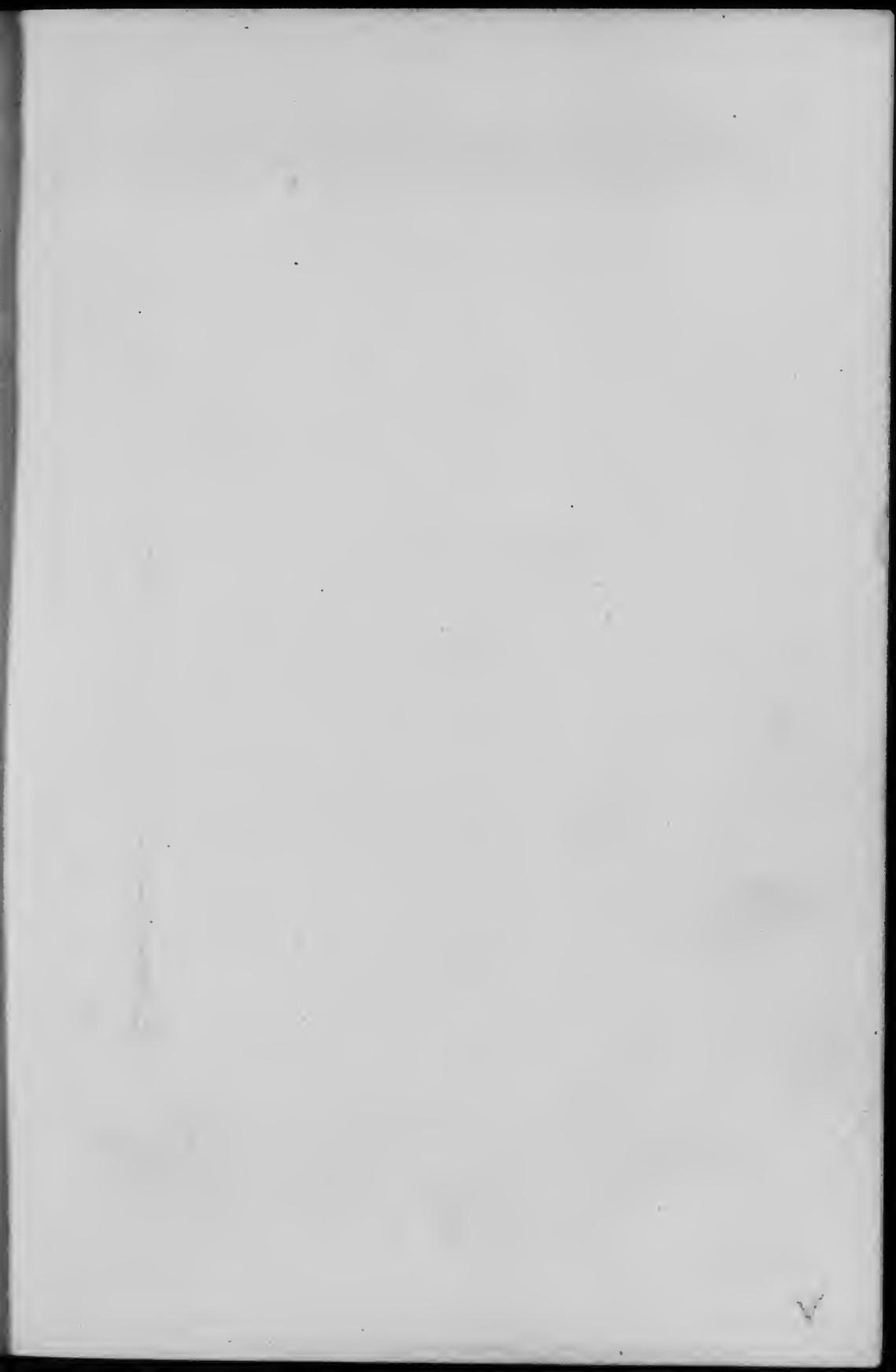
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THREE YEARS
IN
CENTRAL LONDON.

A Record
OF
PRINCIPLES, METHODS, AND SUCCESSES.

BY
EDWARD SMITH,
WESLEYAN MINISTER,

Author of "The Great Problem of the Times" (Fifty-Guinea Prize Essay on Evangelistic Work); "Obsolete or Essential—Which?" (Prize Essay on the Class-Meeting); "An Evangelist's Note-Book."

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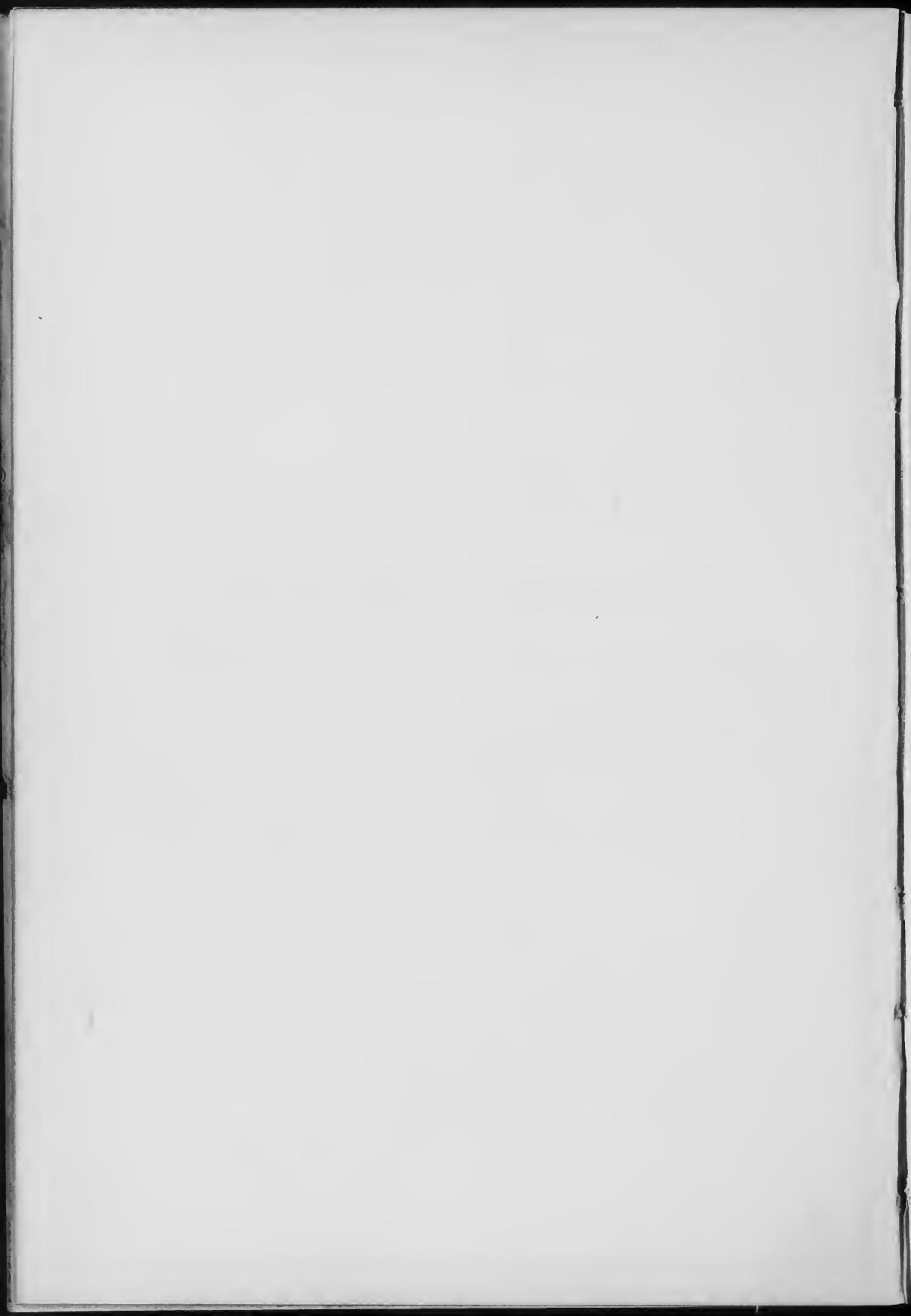
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DEDICATION.

To

THE WORKERS AT ST. JOHN'S SQUARE,
WHO HAVE HELPED ME
AS CHRISTIAN PASTOR HAS BUT RARELY BEEN HELPED BEFORE;
AND, MOST OF ALL, TO MY WIFE,
WITHOUT WHOSE PRESENCE AND SYMPATHY A TASK
SO SEVERE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN
ACCOMPLISHED,
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK.



THREE YEARS IN CENTRAL LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IS it Carlyle who says that “all men are interested in a man if he will but speak the facts of his life for them”? That is saying too much; for interest hinges partly on what the facts happen to be, and partly on the manner of their recital. What are presented in this booklet will be of interest only or chiefly to those who are more or less solicitous that the herding myriads should be thoroughly gospelled. Perhaps, too, the presentation of them will be too clumsy to ensure attention and meditation. My pen has become rusty, and the ink flows slowly. Absorption in one class of work has plainly done for me what it did for a toiler in a sphere widely different to mine. Darwin complained of an atrophy. A specified part of his brain, which was once sufficiently active, became dull and unresponsive. Pursuits alien to this part had demanded and received for many years all the great naturalist’s energies. The enforced idleness of one side of his nature resulted in his eventual loss of all the pleasure which, in the time of its activity, he had so keenly relished on that side. Of some such atrophy I too am conscious. The ease and gladness formerly felt in arranging thought and fact for the printed page have all but vanished. Another sphere of duty has for some time required the focussing upon itself of every power at my disposal. What a pity that so good a cause as will here be pleaded should be marred by a jerky, limping style! Yet so I fear it must be.

But what Joseph Cook called “oughtness” will accept of no refusal. Homespun mission though ours in Central London

assuredly is, it has been thrust into a prominence we never sought to obtain, and has excited widespread curiosity and inquiry. Said the churchwarden of a neighbouring church not long ago, "For the life of me I cannot tell how the thing has been managed. I've lived near the chapel for many a year, and saw it getting lower and lower, and I never thought it was possible to fill it as it is filled." The rumour of this wonder and blessing has even reached the Colonies. Letters asking for full details of principles, methods, and successes come to hand from both sides of the sea. Ministers who bewail a scarcity of hearers and paucity of results, mission-workers whose plans have at best only very partially succeeded, committees whose members are desirous of contributing their quota toward the solution of a heart-wearying problem, have wished to know how the work has been done, that they may, in like manner, achieve. For such as these, and for others whose sympathies toward all true work for God are strong, this narrative is penned.

There is, however, an additional reason for giving it to the public. A great change has come over the churches in their views of soul-saving enterprises. Mr. Moody's marvellous and deserved triumphs gave a false idea of possible results. Had he foreseen this he would have been the first to put the brand of falsity upon it. Men reasoned from his huge audiences and full inquiry-rooms that it was an easy thing to save souls, and that there was no need to pay the old heavy price of endeavour and patience. Then came the Salvation Army, which itself is divinely raised up as a protest against ultra-stiffness in religious worship. Here again, though divergent from the Army, has appeared a collection of mischievous fallacies. A bombastic, Frenchified fashion of talk has come into vogue. Much that is only plated is presented as real metal. The Christian public devours with avidity "got-up" reports. Any one who can paint with a big brush is regarded as a successful painter. What is new is alone received with favour in many quarters. Noise and parade lead away even the discreet. Somebody affirms that "the world in general dislikes accuracy of speaking;" and in this respect the Church of to-day bids fair to rival the world. Kingsley's jibe about "leaving all exaggerated language to the Nonconformists" is far more justifiable than at the time it was coined.

Now I am convinced that while commonplace agencies are more efficient than is believed to be the case, the very opposite is true of many of the more sparkling agencies which now stand so high and boast so loudly.

Better the extreme we have to-day than the one that prevailed twenty years ago, when every evangelist who let his heart run away with him was sneered at as a vulgarist ; when nearly all revival effort was left to hallelujah bands and to converted pugilists, clowns, and blackguards. But surely there is a wiser, happier path somewhere between these extremes ? We have honestly endeavoured to find that path. The Moderates—so called—were a curse to Scotland before the time of the great disruption. Moderates of another kind may be a blessing to England by saving her from disruptions as fatal as the Scottish one was life-giving.

Is any offering of credentials required ? They are not lacking. If the leader of the Central London Mission is not, by this time, an expert in his calling, he ought to have reached a point approaching expertness. Trained throughout youth in the roughest of all schools ; during a ministry of two decades pastor, revival preacher, and writer by turns ; suddenly pitchforked into a large deserted sanctuary within a locality which has long been recognized as a hotbed of social evils, he may fairly be expected to know something about his business. All that had been learned before has been capped by the experiences of a three years so crowded with responsibility, difficulty, and anxiety that they look more like ten years than three. Little thought was there at the commencement of the term that he would ever be in a position to send forth this account. At some periods during these years there has been no appearance of advance, and the prospect of a full building and of a large and vigorous church seemed remote indeed. But the thing is done, and—as unbiased witnesses eagerly testify—well done.

All the chief workers have been filled with a sense of miracle. For it is understood that ours can hardly be called a new departure. Our methods have been, for the most part, simple and ordinary. Some exceptional advantages have been ours. Freedom from care about funds has been one of these. Anything we have asked has been willingly granted by the London Mission Committee. We have had the prayers and

practical friendliness of a large religious circle. Ministers, lay speakers, choirs, have gladly come to our help. But most of our measures may be modified to suit many other regions of Christian experiment. People and pastor have consciously striven to furnish a model. This has been latterly our darling and legitimate ambition. We have believed, and still believe, that God has had before Him objects far beyond those directly and immediately related to our work.

There is every intention not to reflect in any way on any other praiseworthy forms of sanctified toil and venture. If expressions which are somewhat arbitrary are sometimes used, it is only because one who is behind the scenes is compelled to be cognizant of certain specimens of mission work—pretentious, but in reality flimsy and hollow. The more clearly these are seen, the more loathsome they appear. The holier the cause, the more blameworthy the parody.

As our work has shaped itself in a way no one at first expected—as in our growing needs the right agents have always been raised up at the right time—I accept these signs as expressions of the Master's will that our success should be yet more widely known, and our lines of work and warfare largely followed.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT CITY.

ROYAL palaces ; palaces of pleasure ; exhibitions ; famous houses of amusement ; the council chambers of the nation ; the cathedral, the abbey, and the meeting-house ; clubs where the wires that influence national history are pulled ; parks and squares where demonstrations have been held and riots have taken place ; huge and busy railway stations,—these are the salient points of London to the country mind. A flying visit is paid, and as much sight-seeing is put into a few days as many Londoners will contrive in the same number of years. The visitor stands at the thronged crossing-places, nervously coveting the aid of a friendly policeman—for the art of twisting about among the swarm of vehicles has not yet been learned. A horse is down in the street, but the novice's compassion perceptibly abates on his being assured by a bystander (who has in garb and manners detected a "countrified" flavour) that "some horses rather enjoy being down, as it ensures them a brief rest and makes them objects of unwonted attention." It takes some time before new residents get used to the intricate tram and 'bus routes ; and, if they have much journeying to do, getting lost is an experience by no means rare. The novelty of city life soon wears off, but the charm remains and increases. Quiet thought does but intensify the sense of awe. The thinker is conscious of being verily "in the centre of immensities and in the conflux of eternities." While it is true that thousands of London's citizens live and die,

"... and leave no greater mark
Than drops of rain upon the unbounded sea,"

the air is full of great names and of movements fertile for good or evil. The very heart of the world is close at hand. Its beatings can be plainly heard. They may be plaintive or discordant; but that it is the music of the world's central pulsations there can be no doubt. Hence the fascination of the Great City.

But continued observation and reflection lead to the belief that, after all the talk about the "peculiarities" of the metropolis, we have to deal with the same conditions as elsewhere prevail. They are thickened and strengthened, and that is all. The riddle of existence is somewhat more vexing, but it is the same old riddle that used to torment us in the small country village. Human nature breaks out for blessedness or ill in a fashion similar to that with which we new arrivals have long been familiar. A famous burlesque actor when catechized on this matter declared that, though the expressions of appreciation varied in tone and habit, the line of acting which takes in Edinburgh and Leeds finds favour also in London. Despite all that has been said to the contrary, it is much the same in religious methods. All calculations must be based accordingly, or the worker will court failure. Anyhow, country and city agree in points more and more important than those in which they part company. I was not long in finding out that previous experiences in the Midlands and the North were of priceless worth. What was spoken of publicly as producing unfitness for any noteworthy experiment had really cleansed the vision and enabled it to take in more accurately the assigned field.

London is, of all places in the world, the city of contrasts. The illustration of the ragged starveling boy just outside the Bank of England is only one of many that might be adduced. Where is the race for wealth more fierce? Where do the weakest go to the wall as they do here? A "get-one-before-the-other" city with truth it has been dubbed. If Blucher, more than seventy years ago, thought it would be a fine place to sack, what would he say if he could take a leisurely stroll through its well-known thoroughfares at this later time? And yet a friend in East London, whose work is entirely among the poor, remarked to me, last winter but one, that half the people he had to do with were, literally, half starved.

London is the chosen home for swindlers, big and little and variegated. The man who said he "quite believed that honesty

was the best policy, but he thanked God he could do without it," has an abundance of near relatives in spheres high and low. Gambling in stocks has its headquarters here; while the small shopkeeper, believing he can profitably declare his defiance of the Sabbath sentiment, puts in his window, "This shop *is* open on Sunday." The fable about a species of shell scattered over Egypt is, that Satan in a freak changed, once upon a time, all the money into shells. The charge may be dismissed. It is untrue on the face of it. The craving for money has been too good an ally to be set at nought in that way by the Evil One. The great cities of the States alone can match London in that greed of gold which so strongly aids the conspiracies of the powers of darkness. With all this struggle after cash it is, strange to say, freely parted with. There is a lack of thrift in all ranks of society. In some parts of Great Britain monetary gain is valued by many as something that may be kept; here it is mostly prized because it can be *spent*. The "rainy day" theory finds few disciples. Even the very poor will scatter their scanty store right and left, and, if they had more, would deal with it in the same way. A tradesman assured me that a *whole* bundle of chopped wood was used each morning in the poorest homes for lighting fires, when a fourth of the quantity would do just as well. That is only one index among many. But *why should* the poor be thrifty? Mistaken charity spends itself chiefly on the thriftless; and while in bad times the saving are eating into their little hoard, the shiftless are just as well off; for the charitable dole out relief to them, and, if they are at all sharp and unprincipled, they can so work the oracle as to obtain supplies from three or four churches and committees at once. The West End grandes, and such as they, together with the managers of public charities, appear to care but little whether the deserving or undeserving poor get the money, so that it soothes the conscience of the donor, or is got out of hand with the least trouble. At one church the widows received tickets for the customary five shillings. The churchwarden happens to be a publican, and once I had to go half a mile after a policeman on account of a brutal quarrel just outside his doors when his clients were primed with drink. He dealt out the doles at his own place. The language used by the assembled widows was something shocking, and their spokeswoman said to the churchwarden,

"Come, tip it up, old duck! We'll soon change some of it across your counter." There is everything in London to encourage thriftlessness, and those who overcome the temptation are worthy of much praise.

The typical Londoner cannot but suffer in physique. But for the intermarriage with rustic immigrants, the reduction in physical size and force would be much more marked. As it is, even the half-castes are deficient in vigour. Early marriages are a great curse, and so is the union of dwarfs and cripples. Human invertebrates produce after their kind. The laws of heredity act with fearful force.

Over-crowding tends to deteriorate. A clergyman put down, in my hearing, *all* the degeneracy to small rooms, cramped tenements, fetid atmosphere, and intimated that, if this were but altered, all else would rapidly mend. That may be doubted. Experience teaches that, though there are members of the community who would turn a pig-sty into a palace, there are also those who would turn a palace into a pig-sty. In Brazil there are squatters who have all the land before them, and abundance of leisure on their hands, but they choose to live with their families in a narrow space, in squalor and in tainted air; and there are Britishers as plentiful as blackberries who would pervert the best arrangements for their good. More room would only mean more dirt. More light would only annoy them. As the servant girl said when she was reproved by her mistress for having a dirty room, "It's not my fault! It's the fault of the nasty sun that comes shining into every corner and showing every speck." So would they *think*, if they did not say it right out. Yet, though we must not expect too much from the provision of better facilities for healthy living, the housing of the poor loudly calls for the notice of our senators and county councillors. It is a shame that in this land of social progress there should exist a street of five-roomed houses, in hardly one of which there is a family that rents two rooms. What decency and modesty can there be when such a state of things prevails? The tardy action of the civic authorities can only be accounted for on the ground that so many interests are involved. It is easy to rail at abuses, but far from easy to dictate practicable modes of reform.

The sedentary occupations of many of the people contribute

to the poverty of their physique. Add to all this the aggravations that come from unwholesome diet, bad cookery, indulgence in sweet stuff. A doctor in a small provincial town pointed laughingly to the fatty pies and pastry in the shop windows, and ejaculated, "Those pies and that pastry are the best friends I have." And, in this great centre, sugary compounds, stale meat, badly prepared vegetables, stultify the growth and clog the machinery. A 'bus driver hit off well a specimen cockney when he said, referring to the stunted stature and poor chest measurement, "I could make as good a man as that out of old tea leaves."

Allied, however, with inferior physique there are mental smartness and pertness of manner. Erckmann-Chatrian's picture of the perky Parisian volunteers in the First Republic might easily be adapted to sketch the more recent Londoners. Their qualities appear very early. The children are a genus by themselves. One of these saw a sleepy looking cab-hack standing opposite a door, and made the remark, "Oh, I say, here's a 'orse wot leans against a wall to think!" Not at all complimentary to the animal to insinuate that it was fonder of thinking than of working; nor to philosophers either, for that matter, for there was more than a hint that thinking is anything but hard work, and is mostly a sign of idleness. At a children's service held on our premises a good friend was depicting a street scene, and was slowly nearing the climax and moral. He got as far as the appearance of the policeman, and in the most solemn tones asked, "And what do you think the policeman said to me?" A boy shouted out, "Wanted you to 'old a 'orse!" It was too much! The clincher had become an anti-climax. The disgust of the speaker at the bare suggestion that *he* should be requested by a common "peeler" to hold a horse was palpable to all, and the half-smothered laughter of all the adults present utterly spoiled any effect of the address. How precocious the gutter children are is well-nigh beyond stating. One mild example will suffice. At a small mission-school connected with us a good man in middle life made his appearance one Sunday. He saw, sitting by herself, a poorly dressed, slatternly girl scarcely in her teens, blind of one eye and ill-favoured into the bargain. Said my friend blandly, "If you've no one to teach you, *I'll* sit down and teach you." The answer he got from the little

chit was, "And what will my young man say if he finds *you* sitting by me?"

With large numbers of these boys and girls this precocity becomes in after-years shallow impertinence and foul, lecherous wit. Well might Lewis Morris address England as—

"Grave toil-worn land,
Poor aged mother of a graceless brood,
With shambling gait and limbs by labour bent,"

if these are fair samples of her children. With such a burden can she be anything else than borne down? And could we but hear the tales that cabmen and others initiated into the secrets of city life could tell us, we should be confirmed in our belief that "Babylon" is not too emphatic a title for this million-peopled capital. Where is the "demonic element" in man more painfully demonstrated? All phases of the drink evil are found here. Working men and others used to go to public-houses ostensibly "to look at the papers," but, since the stamp tax has been rescinded, they have to find other excuses for haunting these places—and they do find them in plenty. In home after home the complaint of mother or wife is, "He likes company and stays out late, and comes home the worse for drink." Many of the women are more drunken than the men. Females young and old, in faded finery or respectably clad, drink in the bars without shame, taking their little ones there with them. One would surmise that, if womanhood only be spoken of, London is the most drunken place in the world. The consumption of alcohol is the direct cause of a large amount of misery, and a contributory cause of a great deal more. Gambling, too, is making swift headway. A recent writer remarks, "It is a fact more curious than agreeable that, besides securing more or less attention from every general newspaper, 'sport' should have so many prosperous journals exclusively devoted to its interests." These have an immense circulation among all classes on both sides of the river. Turning to the social evil, a godly watchman stationed near the great terminus of the northern railways told me that, between six in the evening and two in the morning, he was compelled to witness sights which made him feel as if perdition itself were being unrolled before his eyes. As one goes eastward or westward the same description would apply, and the law is either careless or powerless. Small surprise then if, as facts like

these get bruited abroad, parents in the provinces dread the settlement of their offspring amid surroundings thus dark and dangerous.

But there is another side to London life, as many of the aforesaid country friends have discovered, when the young man who left home without religion comes back for his holiday full of the love of God. He has fallen in with some pious workmate or active church, and has chosen the better part just when and where the majority appear to be choosing the worse part. And this may be paralleled with the other sex. One who was disgusted with the unblushing wickedness of Paris charitably observed that the best, and indeed the only cure, appeared to be the submerging of the place for a quarter of an hour under the waves of the Atlantic. Many have had similar thoughts and feelings about the sister city on this side of the Channel. But what said the pious, though mistaken, Lady Georgiana Fullerton about the French metropolis? "It is called such a wicked city, but I love it. Only those who know the other side find out its goodness." Much more may these terms be used about London. Those who are privileged to penetrate the inner courts of piety and benevolence are in accord with him who named her as—

"That wondrous mother-town,
Who sits upon our broad Thames like a crown ;
Who mid her healthful labour-laden air,
Grows every day more fair."

No doubt she is more fair or more foul according to our point of vision ; but pessimism is a nuisance, and should be religiously avoided. A great statesman used to fondle the sentiment that "reverence is *the* angel of the world." By "reverence" he meant a loving regard for the institutions of Christianity and civilization. It is to be hoped that this is not the world's *only* angel ; but if even it were,—its smiling face and guardian wings are stretched over the world's largest centre of population, for there is within these boundaries a true and practical respect for every institution that pertains to godliness and progress.

It cannot be denied that the religious element in this irreligious city has its grave blemishes. It is apt to depend too much on shining talent, and too little on honest work. I know no place where talk counts for so much and toil for so little ; where clamour and excitement are so exalted above

high-principled, thoughtful zeal. Representatives of the better class feel more and more lonely, and migrate towards the suburbs. Ministers and church officials follow this example. The flock is neglected; the salt abstracts itself. The giddy, indifferent thousands are left to stew in their own juice—to corrupt each other without check. Christians run up and down after the newest attractions, regardless of any breach of Sabbath-law. And so the indictment might run on, and, after its closing clause had been written, all would admit that there is a measureless residue of enthusiasm, liberality, well-timed effort, unimpeachable consistency.

Here end our point-to-point glancings at London-town, now a hundred towns in one. If Jesus Christ came back to this planet and dwelt in this land—lover of Nature though He would be, with an ear attuned to catch all her soft melodies and delicate thoughts—one rejoices to believe that, for the sake of humanity, He would consent to cut Himself off from Nature and to spend much of His time in the midst of these five millions of souls.

CHAPTER III.

CENTRAL LONDON: LOCAL AND SOCIAL.

MONTHS before the actual appointment to this district came, I had to walk through its heart and along its arteries. It struck me as wearing a smoke-dried appearance, and as presenting an unpromising field for Christian labour. Its streets are built with every assortment of twists and angles. Many of the dwellings have about them a look of faded gentility, and a close inspection reveals that, in four or five-storied houses, once occupied by the fairly well-to-do, five or six households are set up. The encroachments of the warehouses upon the other property is steadily going on. A midday counting of heads would give figures far in advance of any tabulation at midnight, for thousands work during the day in the Centre, but make their way towards the circumference in the evening. Rents are lower there, and there is a bit of garden. Building land hereabouts has reached an almost fabulous price. Partly for this reason blocks of six, seven, and eight-storied model dwellings rise skyward. In one of these fifteen hundred souls may be found, and in other districts treble this number are resting together. Rents are terribly high—nine shillings a week for three small rooms being about the average. One result of all this is that tall houses, once so respectable as to be thought of as the aristocratic portion of the neighbourhood, are tenanted by hundreds of persons who just “pig in” together. Close by our place of worship two of a smaller size were ascertained as containing seventy-seven men, women, and children. Certainly, the writers of novels of the “happy ever after” species must not come to Clerkenwell, St. Luke’s, and Holborn for their inspiration. There is in them little indeed to create happiness.

In Central London there is no one staple trade. In a limited region watch-making and jewellery prevail. All branches of these arts have their *habitat* in our midst. But beyond these an amusing list of odd professions might easily be drawn up. The brass-plate or window-lettering often provokes a smile. "Rouge-maker," "artificial bird's-eye maker," are cited off-hand. Much work is done by the women for the West End houses, and the pay is poor. There are breweries, distilleries, printing establishments, cattle markets—these giving employment to a host of workers. The "residuum" is heavily represented in slum and semi-slum. Foreigners by birth or by descent are numerous.

Another class claims more than a passing allusion. The great wholesale City houses are not far away. In one of these the turn-over in one week was given at more than a hundred thousand pounds. Some of them have over five hundred employés—mostly young men—and resident on or near the spot. We pity soldiers because their position exposes them to painful trials, but they are not one whit more exposed to gross sins than is the young manhood in an important commercial house. Slow and laborious is the promotion, and no settlement in life can be contemplated for a long term of years. In sheer sickness of heart at the dreary prospect before them, a tremendous percentage of the young men give way, spending their scanty earnings in drink and betting and pleasure and lust. In the end there is a ruined character, and, mayhap, a shattered constitution, a lingering illness in the hospital, or a compulsory emigration. Most of these warehousemen come from country homes, and the loving ones there must, eventually, know the whole dark truth. Then there is sorrow and shame. Let one department where twenty hands are employed be instanced. All but one go in for the racing sweepstakes and its kindred evils, and this is more the rule than the exception. I am persuaded that there is, in the world, scarcely any ordeal more trying than that of an ordinary City warehouse—retail as well as wholesale—nor are these men half as much cared for by the heads of firms and by the churches as they should be.

It is not at all pleasant to be closed up in the dingy depressing area of Central London, but a more interesting sphere no one could have. The ground itself is classic. The

literature of this and preceding centuries contains many allusions to its well-known localities. Clerkenwell itself was so named from a curious ceremony. There was an ancient well around which, once a year, on a given day, the "clerks" or clergy used to muster, and there some forty of them would give a dramatic representation of a Biblical episode. This would be followed by a general dance around the windlass. Succeeding this well was a pump, the spout of which is, even now, nailed to the front of the old church. "Saffron Hill," where stealers of handkerchiefs and other small ware used to rendezvous, but which has become the seat of a colony of Italians; the Gate of St. John of Jerusalem (Hospitallers), in whose room Dr. Johnson once composed for the Press, and where the heir to the throne and his eldest son have at two separate times, within the last few months, been chaired as chief members of the Ambulance Society; Smithfield—fragrant with martyr memories—but a babel of noise and confusion as the trysting-place of buyers and sellers of dead meat,—all are our near neighbours at St. John's Square Chapel. In the church just across the Square Mr. Wesley preached, and both Bishop Burnet and Dr. Adam Clarke lived on the very ground adjoining our sanctuary. Other celebrities are associated with familiar streets and squares.

The changes have been remarkable. A dwindling few of the middle classes are left. The flux and reflux of the London tide are nowhere more perceptible. "To shift positions like the fish, but never go far," may be applied to another portion of the City, but not to us. *From* a distance new families come; *to* a distance old families go. No sooner is the hand placed on some who appear to be subjects of saving grace than they disappear, to be heard of no more. A call is made, but the birds have flown, no one knows whither; and the caller, dejected, passes on to another home, only perhaps to be met by another strange face.

In so varied and changeable a population something fresh is ever turning up. A runaway boy has to be sought for, pounced upon, and landed on the midnight mail to be put in the care of the guard; or a disgraced youth has to be ferreted out and influenced and put in a fair way to recover his lost character. The pastoral work itself affords striking experiences—some pleasant, some distinctly unpleasant. An old soldier

is met with who crossed the desert with Stewart, who helped to repel the Arab rush in more fights than one, who was near Burnaby when he was killed, and saw the Nile at Metammeh. Then a pensioned police sergeant is stumbled upon, who in boyhood used to open the gate at Strathfieldsaye for the Duke of Wellington. And, anon, one falls into chat with a Royal Navy man, who was at the storming of the Chinese forts, when the British tars were baffled by the mud, and were brought off by an American captain on the plea that "blood is thicker than water," and at the risk of offending a friendly state. Up rickety stairs of the cork-screw construction till the attic is reached ; climbing in the darkness the stone steps of model dwellings, when a slip means fractured limb or skull ; treading by-ways on which lewdness holds revelry ; discovering in one room a family who have seen better days, and listening to their story till the lump rises in the throat ; paying a visit to a man with a large family who was once a local preacher in Lincolnshire, and who is living with wife and children in a filthy street and filthier room, "out of health," he says, but "out of love with work," as some who have watched him affirm ; face to face with a working man who is known to be an "ugly customer," and is very rough with the tongue, but who, on being patiently borne with, becomes, if not an attendant at the services, still a fast friend (let no one say a word against the parson in that man's hearing ! He'll carefully disclaim in the public-house any intention of defending parsons *as a class* ; but, if that particular *one* were in trouble, wouldn't he do him a good turn, that's all !). Yes, duty among such constituents cannot but be both pleasantly and sadly interesting.

We have in Central London, as a matter of course, the problem of poverty. It is one of the oldest problems in the world. In *very* ancient Rome and Greece there was pitiable poverty, and all the old communities are troubled by the same thing. There are some districts in London much worse off in this respect than is ours ; but ours is sufficiently distressing. We meet with pitiful, heart-breaking cases among the worthy and decently clad. In the East End it is twopence a gross for the match-boxes, and twenty per cent. for the shareholders in the company. In the Centre the prices are fairer, but they are badly cut down, and competition for the

poorest positions is keen. With many families it is just getting along and no more. From several tests we are able to certify that. At our Sale of Work for the good of a thriving and well-worked Sunday School, not two-thirds of our people put in an appearance ; and why ? As one of them confessed to me, "I'd like to help, but I'm run up nearly to my last shilling." So it was with the rest. Here is a family of five. Husband earns twenty-two shillings a week. Rent eight and sixpence, For food, clothing, school-pence, there is left thirteen shillings and sixpence. What reserve can there be out of that ? Illness comes or shortness of work, and then a long spell of silent, heroic suffering. Where the income is small a little help is most timely ; but it must be given in a brotherly or sisterly way. Twice, I believe, life has been saved by my stepping into this class of home just at a crisis. The season of difficulty was soon tided over.

But, if there is no likelihood of the family or the individual finding the feet again, the case is hopeless, and has to be allowed to drop out of sight just because we cannot take pensioners. We have enough of them already. There are anguished faces which haunt me to this day. But what could we do ? Workhouse or the grave was the only relief for those who had no power of recovery ; and, when the children died, who could be sorry ? Some had got under the weather until no rallying was possible ; some had so thrown away their chances that retrieval was out of the question ; some were failures outside London, and, inside it, were even greater failures ; if they were helped to a fresh start, they were soon in the same plight again. To push the way from a lower grade to a higher is difficult amid the jostlings of modern society ; but, for most, it is superlatively easy to sink from a higher to a lower grade. The running down of some makes room for the going up of others ; but, once run down, it requires a strength more than herculean and a wisdom half divine to wind them back again.

There are swarms of the unworthy poor. Loafers who posture as "toilers ;" slip-shod creatures who would rather make a precarious living by picking up newspapers and other odds and ends than do anything that required real labour (they profess to have discerned "the difficulty of living by regular work, and the ease of living without it") ; vagabonds, like the

grandson of Moses, the vagrant priest who acted as "stormy petrel" in the Book of Judges, belying by their conduct their good up-bringing, wanting to work when they like and play when they like, and because they see there is no getting on unless people will work when they don't like as well as when they do, throw up honest labour *in toto*, and trust to their wits,—these are ever on the outlook for free teas and cocoa suppers.

Then there are the cadgers proper. They go from lodging-house to lodging-house, and know well when good things are to be obtained. They cadge for a "night's lodging," and in the winter go to a Salvation Army dépôt for a "doss," but in the summer spend the money in drink, and either walk the streets or sleep where they can. Used to being successful with the reeling off of their plausible story and dolorous experience, they are surprised and indignant at any refusal. The word is quickly passed among cronies and acquaintance. Applications mysteriously drop off. These beggars have better fish to fry, and no longer trouble the acute and peremptory Christian workers with their presence and appeals.

It will easily be seen that, with such materials abounding as they do, to get up a big show-treat is as easily as whistling. The slightest intimation of a "feed for nothing" is ample for the purpose. The beneficent may be invited with confidence to witness the spread. They are entranced at the spectacle. "Oh!" they ejaculate, "what a great and good work dear Mr. and Mrs. —— are doing!" But how to get at the *soul* of your washed-out adults who are minus all self-respect is indeed a puzzle. They have no idea of the Church as a teaching corporation, but only as a corporation for feeding and clothing. They will submit to be practised upon by gushing speakers for the sake of what they can get. But one has to watch a long time and very narrowly to detect any signs of a *soul*. Woe unto the place of worship that parades its generosity to the poor and needy, and makes a name for itself in this capacity of general provider! The more sturdy of the surrounding populace will stay away. They resent any implication of being mixed up with what is pauperizing. Any invitation to them from this direction will be little short of crying aloud to vacancy. The women *may* be persuaded, and even the respectable ones *may* be bribed into attending the

meetings and gorging themselves with the well-meant bounty of their hosts and hostesses ; but not so the men. *They* look with lofty disdain upon the whole affair.

The children get into the way of expecting to be fed. The promise of a bun or a cup of coffee will draw hundreds of them to a Band of Hope or other meeting. There is more hope in their getting moral benefit than of their elders. Impressions of the right kind may be made upon the boys and girls. But, unless gifts are carefully dealt out, they become cunning and deceitful. A well-known lady was walking along a Central London road when she was accosted by a shivering, whining child : "Poor orphelin, mum ! Ain't had nothink to eat since yesterday mornin', mum ! Only a penny, please ! So hungree, mum !" "Ah, my little lad, so you're an orphan, are you ?" "Yis, mum ! Only a penny, mum !" "Poor boy ! and where do your father and mother live then ?" "In Queen Street, mum !" Unhappily for the boy's parents, in giving him his lesson, they had not taught him what "orphan" meant, and his plea failed. Most of these children are not to be caught in that way. With what they see and hear on all sides they cannot but be depraved. After the great fire in London it was enacted that not more than one family should live in a house. Whether that law is repealed I do not know, but obedience to it would not be feasible now. The other extreme is reached, alas ! and the living room and sleeping room are one. The little ones do get out a good deal. There are freed squares and asphalted burial-grounds and extensive yards of the model dwellings. They appear to be as happy as village children, and, on the whole, I believe, are as happy ; for there is a law of Providence which tends to fit the character happily into its environment, and by this dispensation of mercy the children profit.

CHAPTER IV.

CENTRAL LONDON: ITS MORAL CONDITION.

A WRITER who is likely to be a strong candidate for the Laureateship has stated that—

“ All our lives are made of notes that fade and sink,
And so are merged in the full harmony of Being.”

Had he dwelt where I do, these lines would not have been written. There is not much “harmony of Being” discernible, nor does a study of faces prophesy a near millennium. There is no scarcity of steady men, neat women, and happy homes. The marriage-bond is not disregarded as it is in some parts of Great Britain, nor is there so high a rate of illegitimacy scheduled. But there is more than the usual admixture of persons who, while despising the follies to which their neighbours are given, are blind to their own foibles and unrighteous prejudices. They are above the range of common petty sins ; but they yield to evils more rare and polished, but equally corrosive. They abuse all pleasures but those toward which they have natural inclination ; but, mildewed with indifference, do not apologize for their own truculent treatment of sundry laws of Heaven.

To say that Sabbath-breaking is rampant is but to give vent to the bare truth. Cheap railway and steamboat fares, fishing clubs, dramatic recitals at public-houses on Sunday evenings, all contribute to this. The yells of paper boys commence early in the morning, and the shriek of the periwinkle man defiles the later day. The brass bands of the political clubs disturb the school and Bible classes, and make the afternoon hideous ; while the butcher and greengrocer bawl till the noontide hour sets in. I was greatly tickled by a burly member of the former profession. Remonstrating with the children playing around

he said : "Now, you youngsters, stop that ! Remember it's Sunday, and you ought not to be running about in that way." His own shop was open ; but perhaps he would reply to any objector, that his clients, having no place in which to keep fresh meat, were reduced to trading on the Sabbath, and that he was virtuously wishful to accommodate customers.

A temperance lecturer, who spent a week with us, asserted that, in all his travels, he never saw so much drinking as he was compelled to witness in Central London. It is done more scientifically than in the forging and mining districts. There is more regular "nipping" and less "boozing." The distinction between "elevation" and drunkenness is finely drawn. There are signs in abundance that those who drink to the health of others drink away their own health. The very publicans themselves present the most painful examples of the ill effects flowing from an intimate connection with "the trade." Domestic misery, conjugal unfaithfulness, early death, are matters of common report as among them.

Around the drink-habit various evils congregate. A prominent gin-palace was specified to me by a policeman on point duty as a notorious resort of gamblers and bad characters. The same reputation may be attached to most of them. Street rows are of ordinary occurrence. Rough immoral girls and youths abound. There is no police court which evidences an ampler crop of naughtiness than Clerkenwell. Even in the squares, which wear so quiet a look, the night is invaded by the frightful noises of music-hall patrons and well-dressed rowdies. No respectable woman, if alone, is safe from insult after dusk has set in. Acts of gross indecency I myself have witnessed, time after time, opposite my own window, and these when gently nurtured children have been playing about. There are grounds for fear that, even in those portions of Central London that appear most orderly, there is much that is questionable transacted behind the screen. The vestries whose membership is created by the elective voice of the people, have an unsavoury reputation for railing and disorder. The Free Libraries Act has been adopted, but its promoters are compelled to provide the sporting paper for its reading-room, thus helping to debauch those whom they sincerely wish to benefit.

Great excitements reveal the realities of life and morals

in any considerable and fermenting population. The famous writer on the French Revolution tells us how, when the tocsin was rung, the denizens of low-grade Paris swarmed forth. Until that excitement swept through the city no one suspected what a rabble it contained. Hoarse-voiced, dilapidated men, garrulous vixenish women, and all with a tigerish thirst for blood—human dynamite, verily! Some such sight met my eyes on the occasion of the public funeral of a godly young policeman whom I had to inter. The Police Band went through a mile of streets, playing the Dead March and the Portuguese Hymn. A hundred comrades of the dead man tramped steadily behind. Central London was ablaze with excitement. Every alley, side-street, and workshop poured forth its contingent. Oh the running, shouting, joking, insensibility to the solemnities of death! Oh the countenances—bloated, foxy, fiendish, soulless! Profane young men, blasphemous old men, drink-spotted women of all ages and sizes, trooped along by the side of the car, and in company with the procession. My heart was heavy at the loss of one of our noblest members; but this revelation of humanity, as seen through the windows of a mourning coach, made it heavier still. Why, if some of those who thronged the pavement only had a practical belief in the devil, they might be better than they are now: worse they could hardly be. The very work-girls in that region, if riding in a public conveyance with a minister or other representative of religion, are prone to indulge in open scoffs and witticisms, and, if rebuked, will give ten words for one. Illustrations, well-nigh numberless, there are as to the truth of the saying, “Terrible the hour when man’s soul spurns all rules, and shows what dens and depths are in it. There are depths in man that go as deep as the lowest hell.” Never were there clearer exhibitions of the way in which God punishes badness by allowing the guilty ones to be pushed into greater badness.

“ There comes a time when the insatiate brute within the man,
Weary of wallowing in the mire, leaps forth, devouring ;
And the cloven satyr-hoof grows to the rending claw ;
And the lewd sneer to th’ horrible fanged snarl ;
And the soul sinks and leaves the man a devil :
All his sin grown savourless,—and yet he longs to sin.”

Somewhere there has been printed the “Tale of a Mat.”

It is supposed to have been at the door of a Wapping tavern. It tells of the persons who entered the place, and of the scenes witnessed within. The narrative, evidently drawn from life, is simply blood-freezing. But many a mat in Central London could tell a story that would all but equal this in wickedness and horror. Recently an episode occurred not a long distance from our work-ground. Low women and vile men were drinking together in a public-house. One of the women, by some means, got on fire ; and, at once, all the men cleared out, and let the shrieking wretch burn to death.

On first reconnoitring the position, past experience told me of the existence of many difficulties ; but, had *all* been apparent, they might have been too much for my faith and courage. Many a day have I felt inclined to use the fretful words of the ancient sage, “ ‘Tis time to leave the world, since truth itself is dead.” That this was too dark-coloured a view to take about the moral condition of Central London I hope to show in a subsequent chapter ; but as this seems a convenient place for the insertion of a brief chapter on Secularism and Socialism, and as the neighbourhood we are dealing with affords an eligible standpoint for ascertaining something like right notions about these systems, I will address myself to the task.

CHAPTER V.

CENTRAL LONDON: SECULARISM AND SOCIALISM.

TERMS and adherents melt into each other. There is much of a muchness about them. There are schools and schools; but the difference between them is, as it was said to be with a barrister and a lawyer, the difference between a crocodile and an alligator. Their votaries interfere but little with public religious work. Open-air services are rarely disturbed. One young sceptic sent me a long journey on a fool's errand by means of a false address, and then chuckled over his cleverness; another doughty champion threw some infidel tracts down the school area, and then quickly decamped, his valour having so soon oozed away. But that is about all. There is an idea abroad that a leader of Christianity in this part of the City is like a man swimming about among sharks. There could hardly be a greater error. Not more than two or three up-grown men have insulted me in the streets during these three years, and they were under the influence of drink. In neither case, as far as I know, had socialist feeling anything to do with it—except perhaps indirectly. Mayhap insult is escaped because I have laid aside clerical attire. Twice we have been interfered with, and twice only, in our worship. On the first occasion a person encouraged an organ-grinder to play, night after night, while our meetings were going. But happening to take drops of poison in the belief that they were strong drops of another kind, that person was brought to death's door, and was the recipient of a kind inquiry from a leading friend. The opposition ceased after that. Again, one evening when the chapel was crammed, a notorious individual, who is at present cooling his hot head in prison for a similar offence at St. Paul's

Cathedral, suddenly yelled out and blew a small trumpet. Even now I shudder to think of what a panic would have meant with the gallery stairs and entrances as they then were ; but the tumult was hushed down, and the person in question was promised in the minds of some of our working men the tutoring of a good ash stick if he came again. With neither of these had Secularism any influence.

But with many men and some women it has influence. Reports of infidel women reach me. They are about one in ten to the men, as I hear, but have this moral disease in the worst form. Frequently of heads of families are we told, not "they don't go anywhere," but "they don't believe in anything." When a valued gift of book-almanacs came to hand, and the portrait of the Queen was seen to occupy the front page, it had to be torn off before the literature was circulated ; just for the reason that, if left on, it would excite angry feeling in many quarters, and block our way into the homes. Men who come in from the country are freely experimented upon by the agents of all shades of scepticism, are filled with crude harmful notions, and not only are turned into haters of capitalists, but are made disloyal to religion, being cajoled into the belief that the interests of religion and capital are the same, and that both are antagonistic to the working classes. It is sober truth to state that in a number of workshops the tyranny of infidelity is most detestable. Any Christian man who happens to be employed within them or in the great yards is chaffed and teased and bullied, and compelled to hear the most cruel blasphemies against his Lord. The weaklings in such places, the unpronounced, in spite of their better feelings, take sides with the majority. Coercion exists in its worst form.

Since commencing residence and toil in Central London my thoughts of the morale of working-class scepticism has been depressed rather than raised. While quite admitting that among its followers there are some that are chaste and sincere, I am bound to say that of real benevolence towards persons and families on the part of socialist or secularist emissaries I find no traces whatever. There are in their ranks resolute, strong-jawed, clear-headed men, but there are crowds of human molluscs as well. The infidel chiefs themselves regard these latter as an infliction, except in so far as they help to

swell the numbers in some demonstration. One of these chiefs, when asked how he would deal with such specimens, said, "I would put them up in barrels, take them to Dungeness, label them 'Rubbish!' and roll them off into the sea."

Within two hundred yards of our chapel is the great meeting-place of London discontent—Clerkenwell Green. There the most violent language is indulged in. I myself heard a speaker say, without one word of remonstrance from his audience, "People are talking just now about John Bright. I can tell you that John Bright is dead and damned and in hell. Anyhow, if there is a hell, I hope *he's* there." Much latitude of speech is allowed by the attendant constables, and arrests are scarcely known. Oaths, even in the speeches, are common. In the infidel halls there is a strict alliance between the library and the beer-tap ; and, as soon as the public-houses are open on the Sunday morning—church hours being over—it is difficult to keep together a meeting of any size. Having to be the receptacle of much that is "private and confidential," I can only say that to my ears have come stories about "spouters" and "patriots" which have had as their burden the shameless trading away of female virtue. With most of these gentry it is to be feared that this is a very light matter. Had some of them their choice they would repair their broken fortunes at the expense of their country. Others, if it served their purpose, would betray the people whom they have flattered and caressed. What Wilkes, the popular hero, did they would imitate—would bitterly sneer at their old friends if it paid them to do it. In Russia the worst enemies of the populace are those who have sprung from their midst. Using them as a ladder first, they have then kicked it away and broken it. In England there are demagogues who would answer to this prototype, the opportunity once fairly given. Both speakers and hearers would rather govern themselves badly than have others govern them well. They are full of self-esteem, helping to prove the proposition that "the sceptic's sixth sense is vanity." They prefer talking about the rights of men to engaging in the duties of men. It is so much easier and pleasanter. If this evil leaven once gets thoroughly in, it takes a great deal of getting out, as we have had the means of knowing. The checks of Christianity are upon these systems

and their advocates. Leave them, licensed and untrammelled, and where should we be? Were there not three thousand gaming-houses in the French capital a hundred years ago? In the Commune, with the explicit sanction of the authorities, were not the walls covered with the most indecent prints and inscriptions, and did not the ruling powers call it "Fun"? No doubt the working people of London are suffering injustice in many ways, and we cannot marvel if they violently revolt against this; but, in obeying the dicta of fire-eaters, they are jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. They are not made more happy, but less so. One vicious orator on "the Green" met with this repartee from a listener: "Well, if what *you* believe makes you as miserable as you look, I'll have none of it." A loud laugh went through the crowd. The scoffer was snuffed out for the nonce. These deluded folk are mostly soon put out, and have no self-mastery. They are like the Deistic philosopher who, while holding a stately morality in his writings, became furious if the mutton was slightly overcooked. Oh that these deceived ones would take to heart what even the woman of fashion could say to the mocker at religion, her own heart melting as she let the words drop from her lips: "And what can *you* give the world in return for the glorious hope you rob it of?" From the spectacle of the actual results of Socialism and Secularism on the characters and lives of some of their professors, we are led to quote the words:

"If haply want of faith be not a crime blacker than murder,
When we fail to trust One worthy of all faith."

There are some signs that these schools are losing a portion of their pupils. The attachment to them becomes more nebulous, and then ceases totally. Or there has to be, periodically, a general whipping up of adherents. Still their notions are hard to deal with, seeing that "there is a great deal of vague unorganized Socialism,"—as a received authority tells us. Old evils do pass away certainly, but new ones are born, which feed upon their corpses, and get life out of their death. If the public-house is forsaken the club is taken to, and the training of the first prepares for the second. Mr. Charles Booth, whose recent work in East London has excited such attention, tells his readers that "a working-men's club is not a bad institution,

and it is one with very strong roots." From all I can learn there is not the least reason to dispute that it has strong roots, but there is every reason to question that it is "not a bad institution." It is a breeding-ground and feeding-ground of many bad things, of which sceptical principles are not the least. If we could put the wives of working men into the witness-box, they would make such revelations about late hours, intoxication, betting, ill-temper, as would lead to a movement for the suppression of these associations in their present form.

CHAPTER VI.

CENTRAL LONDON: RELIGIOUS LIFE AND WORK.

A MONG this seething population the proportion attending public worship, either regularly or irregularly, is deplorably small. Pessimism, however, finds its cause sometimes in the wish to avoid duty. Paint conditions in colours of the darkest, and there is an opening for the use of a word most palatable to those who wish to neglect an irksome task—the word “impossible.” But to one who desires to fulfil all righteousness the discovery of bright places is sweet. The honey of encouragement is far from scarce when we take into consideration that there are to be found rooms dwelt in by those who possess a high-toned piety; families where oneness and affection prevail, and where the daily offering of self-consecration is laid before God; sufferers who are upborne by religion, and show the most touching patience—

“From out the core of suffering flows a secret spring of joy;” zealous believers who shrink from no ordeal if they can but glorify their Master; faithful agents of the Lord, voluntary and paid, who plod on from the first of January to the thirty-first of December. It is said that a working man went to an exhibition of pictures in a notorious and benighted part of the City, and saw on one canvas a representation of the old Persian idea of a battle between the God of good and the god of evil. In audible reflection he muttered, “Somehow, it don’t seem much of a fight about here!” He meant that the powers of evil appeared to have matters pretty much their own way. If any one thinks this about London’s centre they are out of the right reckoning. The contest is not one-sided, for good makes a splendid fight of it. There are large halls worked on undenominational lines, and well filled. Objectors state that this does not mean so much as it may be thought to mean; that attendance at a public hall does not commit a man

religiously as does attendance at church or chapel ; that, because the people are strangers to each other, and are ranged under no sectarian banner, there is little cohesion between life and life ; that it is supremely easy to fill a hall by bright singing and other attractions, the actual preaching of the Gospel being relegated to a minor position. But if all this be allowed, there is still a heaped-up remainder of comforting result from these gatherings. In themselves they are a sharp protest against the infidel lecture hall, and a proof that some of the best specimens of the labouring folk have religious tendencies and a conscientious regard for the Lord's Day.

It cannot be gainsaid that the interests of *some* of the churches of the Establishment are pushed by methods unworthy of a worthy historic system. Clerics of the High Church party indulge in prejudiced comments on Nonconformist toilers, and their teachings are echoed by the "sisters" who are associated with them. It has come to my knowledge that, when some of these good gentlemen find a person quite alone in the house, they suggest that this providential chance for confession of sins to a duly accredited priest shall be thankfully embraced. It *has* happened that they have fallen in with a pious Methodist woman who has her "experience" to fall back upon, and whose tongue can go "like a bell-clapper;" and then the well-intentioned clergyman has been put ignominiously to the rout, his guns spiked, and himself driven off the field. I have laughed to the point of exhaustion at hearing the victor's naive story of the encounter. But, if their doctrines *do* savour of Rome, and their practices *are* repugnant to common sense, and many of them *have* a wholesome dread of a face-to-face talk with the sturdy British voter, their deeds of mercy are manifold, and furnish a living contradiction to the secularist flout and the socialist libel as to the unpractical character of modern Christianity. It must be admitted that the Puseyite parson has no fit substitute for salvation by faith. A young man under conviction of sin visited a service got up on the Ritualistic plan, and, when it was over, broke out, "A fellow might walk his legs off in going to these places without getting what he wanted." Such as he cannot be dealt with by a song-singing held in a mission-room on the Sunday night after the day's celebrations are finished ; he is likelier to get what he seeks for in a well-conducted inquiry-room. Nor will

a working-man's guild, whose members are kept under the minister's dog-whip, suffice to satisfy the anguished cry of the soul. Over these guilds a loud cackling is made; but those who are of stiffer clay and inquisitive turn of mind are far from being assured that they are a success either in the quantity or quality of their membership. Still, bodily ailments are mitigated; the widow's heart is made to sing for joy; the orphans are not forgotten; and, though these friends of the poor are glaringly imposed upon, they earn the loving thanks of many a home. That is a grand set-off against mistakes and doctrinal misleadings.

The Low Church struggles hard, but the pulpit is its weakness. Who of its ministers gets any grip on his parishioners as a public speaker? The same may be said of the members of the Broader cliques. They, too, are infested with communicants of whom it is currently reported among the neighbours that they only go to the Lord's Table for the sake of prospective temporal benefits, and not from any real desire to nourish their life in God. But can we fail to admire the self-devotion of the clergyman and his small body of faithful helpers? Year in and year out, amid much that crumbles away just when they hope it will prove substantial, they toil on without fainting, and, if not able to create all the good they would, they provide a steady corrective of iniquity. Barring a few, the Nonconformist sanctuaries are poorly attended. Some of them answer well to the sketch—called sometimes the travesty—of the meeting-house and its people in “Alton Locke.” Hyper are they in their Calvinism, and apparently careless about the destinies of the thousands who swarm about their very doors. Others make frantic and spasmodic efforts to gain the ear of the crowd and to draw in negligent ones, but with small effect. But here again the nucleus of loyal Christians does more than is thought in leavening the inert and graceless mass around them. The Lord be praised for their presence and activities!

The summation of the whole matter is here: though the number of places of worship has grown, the total of attendance in Protestant sanctuaries has not grown. There are traditions to-day of the crowded chapel in which Baptist Noel preached, and of the large full church under the charge of Dr. Maguire: and what are they now? The exodus of the moral and

religious element has told with deadly effect upon them. The flourishing Countess of Huntingdon cause has dwindled, and its very site is occupied by an Anglican establishment, through whose lavish charities the independence which has been the honour and grace of the working-man's home is covertly conspired against. Methodism cannot crow over other churches in this matter of continued religious interest, for all around her circuit system is a partial and noteworthy failure. Every circuit reports fewer persons in membership year by year. A study of the figures is cruelly suggestive. The financial strain becomes almost too great to be borne. Persons are tempted to urge other excuses for leaving the chapel, whereas the real reason is that the claims for money have become quite back-breaking, just because there are fewer shoulders on which they can be placed.

English people and foreigners there are who are under bondage to Popery. They believe it represents "the old and only religion." Church subscriptions and masses for the dead must be attended to, even when it drives them into pawning their trinkets and furniture. A venomous refusal of tracts, an insulting reply to invitations, are traceable to their blind belief in the supremacy of their church. One wonders whether they would not be as well off without any faith at all as with such a faith as this. But Father Damien's voice asserts the contrary, and all are disposed to listen to *that*.

Usually the Temperance movement is hand in hand with religion. It is less so in Central London than elsewhere; nor is it, in itself, as vigorous as in some localities. There is one society which, though it weans its partisans from the drink, is in peril of fostering intemperance in other directions. Under its auspices coffee and other liquids are inordinately consumed, cards are played, bad language is indulged in, and homes are neglected. Low amusements are favoured, and, in cases under my own observation, the soul has been pushed farther than ever from God. It is equally true, and is a fact that should be rejoiced in, that other instances can be brought forward in which the Temperance crusade has been a most valuable ally.

Looking around, I cannot but perceive that the ground has been allowed largely to run to waste. It is in a hard and tangled state. Many back reckonings have to be faced in any attempt to evangelize the population on an adequate scale.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR WORKSHOP.

ON the very year of my birth was opened the chapel at St. John's Square, Clerkenwell. An intertwining of destinies, once most unlikely, has come to pass. Within an hour or two of the agreement on the part of the London Mission Committee to take up the place, I was on the spot examining and prospecting. An ungainly structure met my eyes. "Perhaps the forbidding outside belied the inner convenience?" Not at all! It is worse inside than out. The windows have seemingly never been cleaned since the place was erected, and they are so encrusted with dirt as to make the building, in some states of the atmosphere, more like a family vault than anything else. The rostrum had been lowered till it no longer commanded the gallery,—the reason for that will presently appear. Still, it was a distinct advantage to have a rostrum. The old stone pulpit was turned into a dust-bin in the back yard. The pitch of the gallery is such that, even if the platform had been raised, the people behind the front seat would have had the greatest difficulty in seeing the preacher. The gallery doors opened inwards, and came in contact with the stone steps, leaving a passage not more than two feet in width. They were death-traps. The schoolroom is underground, low-roofed, ill-ventilated, and always requires the lighting of the gas. The four vestries would make capital dungeons, so stuffy and dusky are they. There can be no doubt that the premises were never built for a big business. The expectation of the promoters of the building scheme was that a moderate middle-class congregation would assemble, and that the membership would never rise beyond the point of "fair," and would be, moreover, of a staid, contented character. Many fourth-rate

country towns have Methodist buildings far superior to these. There is no other Wesleyan chapel within a mile,—and what a mile means in the way of inhabitants in Central London only the residents can know. There *was* one chapel within two-thirds of a mile; but that has been sold, and its small remnant of membership is slowly melting away. The only redeeming feature about St. John's Square is its seating accommodation. It can actually furnish seats for a thousand; but, at a push, we have had eleven hundred and fifty within its walls.

The ordinary congregation was considerably below the membership, this latter being about one hundred and thirty. There was a small disorderly Sunday School. The gallery was all but deserted—two, three, and four, and on anniversary occasions possibly six, persons being found there. (N.B.—It seats five hundred.) Downstairs the gaps and empty pews were so many that the people appeared as if frightened at each other, and in danger of taking cold from eddies of air. There was a look of hopelessness about everything. The Mission Band strove loyally, but with scantiest results. Some of the best ministers in Methodism were attached to the City Road Circuit; but their ministry at St. John's was a burden and a cross to themselves, whatever it was to the people. Every five years, as the circuit books testify, witnessed a new and serious declension. If strangers came, they were often unnoticed, and, as some of them have since told me, vowed they would never enter that cold, clammy place again. Persons who passed it and knew its belongings gazed upon it as if it were infected or haunted. As it was, it had become a standing disgrace to the Wesleyan Connexion. When a place gets down as it had done, it is easy to let it down lower still; and beyond question absolute bankruptcy was being steadily approached. It is said that there used to be somewhere within the chapel the Biblical inscription about the "*two or three* being gathered together;" but it was felt to be painfully appropriate, and was at last painted out. So forlorn, indeed, was the whole concern that the building was neither licensed for marriages nor for public worship. Both licences had to be procured by myself.

What could be the reasons for all this? It was not for lack of musical attractions, for the choir was always a good one. Nor was it because the population had thinned off, for though

warehouses have taken the place of residences on some sides, and other residences have been turned into workshops, the inhabited tenements contain more souls than forty years since, and blocks of "models" have arisen. The census returns show that numbers are about stationary. It is the old, old story. The small middle-class representation yet remaining was—wittingly or unwittingly—selfish. It did not show any desire to have the working people, unless they would come on its own terms—that is, unless they would consent that liveliness should be sacrificed to ornateness, fervency to respectability, and that they would efface themselves from all claim to a voice in church councils. They may do the rough work if they come, but they must be made to feel that their preferences are to be kept subordinate to the wishes of the ruling few. Were we to judge some of the ruling powers by their conduct, we should infer that they rather liked a small and scattered congregation—enjoyed its selectness, in fact. If there is an inrush of new faces we should be prepared for the wail, "Dear me! I used to know everybody; now I hardly know anybody! Oh for the old days of thinness and staidness!" If things are in this state, the taking over of this old stock-in-trade is the heaviest part of the task, for it has evidently not been altogether "the survival of the fittest;" the least fit also have survived, and with them the power of making the renovator's duties particularly ungrateful. Yet, thank God! some both felt and talked in a way absolutely extreme from this; and at a bazaar held on the premises one of the best furnished of the stalls was that provided by those "old friends" who rejoiced in our success, and took this way of expressing their sympathy and gladness.

There was this additional reason for the ill condition of affairs at "the Square": it was under the shadow of Methodism's cathedral—City Road. It had no resident pastor, and the minister who was supposed to pay attention to its needs found that most of his energies were demanded by the mother chapel.

Such was this place of worship handed over to the London Mission upon the resolute action of a wise superintendent, who saw in this its only chance. At first sight the hindrances to victory seemed insuperable. It is much easier to work up a new connection than to revive one which has fallen into decay. Obstruction on the spot gave me so much anxiety and pain as to bring on an illness that threatened to be fatal. During

eleven weeks I only preached once, and then was unfit to do anything of the kind. The very word "mission" aroused dread. Its honourable origin and antecedents were not dwelt upon. There was the fear that drastic measures would be resorted to, and vulgar expedients adopted. Localized ideas, family jealousies, suspicions of the new-comers who presented themselves and were utilized, were fruitful sources of trouble. Worse still, there was the impression to be battled with and lived down, that a man sent with a free hand by a committee meant dictatorship on the part of the chosen agent and humiliating restraints on the part of the committee. All things considered, then, St. John's Square was about the last place I should have picked out for the experiment then in my mind.

But advantages not previously surmised cropped up. Apparently cut off from crowded streets on three sides out of four, the chapel really taps several neighbourhoods and many varying constituents. It is capitally placed. It was originally built within a space hard of access; but the Board of Works drove a road right through the Square, and opened out the premises admirably. Since their transfer alterations have been effected. Entrances and choir seats have been greatly improved. A hundred sittings have been added in the gallery. A small piece of land behind proved useful for lecture hall and vestry purposes. Of that every available inch has been occupied, and, if we had not been sorely crippled by rights of light, more would have been done. So that, although injurious circulars were sent out by some opponents of the change, and inspired articles most unfairly commenting on the attempt to grapple with the case were inserted in a Clerkenwell print, although the people themselves had so little faith that, when a challenge was given that any one believing the chapel could be filled should hold up a hand, only one hand was held up; there were assuredly some helpful and stimulating circumstances, and there was no need to despair of eventual triumph.

I remember that, in the early days of the work, there came to me after service one Sunday morning a seedy-looking mortal, who informed me, with an important air, that he was a 'reporter.' "I am come to report for the _____" (naming a local publication), "and there are some things about the service and in the sermon that I don't care for and cannot agree

with, and I shall say so." "All right, sir," said I; "'tis with me as it was with the eels." "Eels, sir!" replied the man, who looked all the time as if he would gladly give a laudatory account, if I would but tip him with a new suit of clothes. "Eels, sir!" said he: "what of them?" "Well, after the cook had skinned them, some one protested against the cruelty of the process. 'Ah, poor things!' said she; 'but it's nothing when they get used to it.' And, sir, your criticism will be nothing to me. I am used to that sort of thing." Needless to say, he did not report anything flattering either of the preacher or of the service. On three other occasions, by bland, suave assurances that we had really nothing worthy of a place in the columns of the great London dailies, their reporters have been staved off. That there were good reasons for this line of action will be made manifest in the next chapter. Or perhaps it had better be anticipated by the present statement, that it was no part of my purpose to lighten the hardship of filling St. John's Square by courting notoriety and by inviting the attendance of a contingent of the noble army of London stragglers. Had I desired to crowd the place with gadabouts, other measures, perfectly within reach, would have been necessary. They would have brought attendants from far and wide, and the congregation would have been little better than a rope of sand. Lest anything like this should happen, the work has been kept out of the newspapers, secular and religious, from the first.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRINCIPLES AND AIMS.

WERE the writer of this work its reader, it is probable that he would be tempted to hurry along, so as to get to the results and methods. It is best, however, to dwell for a short time on the principles laid down and the aims defined. To work for God aimlessly and listlessly is better than not to work at all. But it is good policy to state and re-state what objects are before the worker. These objects will mainly be shaped from the principles adopted. Many fallacious notions would be exploded if we could only drive Christians back upon sound positions, and much waste of time, labour, money, would be prevented. In doing this, though, one may easily be *too* practical. Doctors and nurses experience this very peril of undue practicality. Contact with obdurate realities rubs away their sentiment, and they become harshly calculating without intending so to be—that is, if they do not exercise much care. It is the same in every species of evangelism. Christlike sentiment is apt to lessen as the years pass by.

We must bear with those who, either from disposition or training, cannot wholly take up with our drift of principle, even as we cannot with theirs. There may be a constitutional defect on either side, and mutual forbearance is needful. Now, my own personal peculiarity is found in a strong natural leaning toward rationalism. The "signs infallible" of a power that cannot be accounted for from any natural causes whatever have always been among the requirements of my religious life. When, rendered desperate by failure, the churches have taken refuge in wild talk and doubtful methods, and from all this effects have accrued and been boasted of, the one question has always popped up, "Is there anything more than mere excitement here? Is there anything that demands the *supernatural* before it can be understood?"

That query has disposed of many sensationalisms of which others would take an opposite view. To gain and hold a strong substantial belief is worth living for and dying for ; but, personally, that belief does not come without the amplest evidence that certain results can only be explained on the supposition that prayer is being answered, and that God Himself is moving mightily on men's souls. Most of my fellow-workers are not so dependent on this, and do not therefore need so stringent an application of hard-and-fast principles.

For a long while there floated before my mind an ideal, gradually formed and drawn primarily from the Acts and Epistles, as to what a modern church ought to be and do ; but the opportunity to reduce it to practice did not come till the Central London pastorate was thrust upon me. "Is it possible to gather together, little by little, a sinewy aggressive church in whose life and labours reason and emotion shall be wisely and delicately combined ?" "Is it possible to constitute a church which shall provide a home for nearly all sorts of natures, and shall furnish, in this way, a multitude of affirmative answers to the query, 'Can the Individual rise though the Race sink down in disgrace?'" Such questionings as these possessed me. Connected with the ideal thus formed was the now somewhat scouted belief that the one chief duty of a Christian pastor is to care for single souls. "We must be content to speak, not to the thousands, but to the *ones*," says a competent judge of men. Any minister who thinks himself above such work will be almost certain to fall below it. But I was met by the assurance that in Central London this plan is not feasible. That there are here drawbacks to this duty cannot be denied ; but, on the whole, it may be performed, and with good outcome. No trouble pays better than trouble with the units. The theory that souls are easily won had been long ago dismissed from my mind. A squib-and-rocket evangelism draws its inspiration from the supposal that there is no work easier than that of getting persons to forsake their sins and come to Christ. I have listened with pain to the words of one who ought to have known better. "In my experience the greatest difficulty is to keep men and women from being converted." What a mistake ! But perhaps the word "converted" did not mean to him anything deep and radical. In the Middle Ages a priest and a general were

studying, during war time, the map of a hostile country which was about to be invaded. The reverend father put his finger on sundry places dotted on the map, and remarked, "This fortified town must be taken, and then this, and this." The soldier broke in, "I may be allowed to remind you, Father Joseph, that fortified towns are not taken with the tip of the finger." Never did the churches need the application of this thought more than they do at this present. To capture a soul for heaven is a feat upon which we must not calculate unless we are prepared to expend care and pains. The nursing of the weak into strength, and of the ignorant into knowledge, is not achieved without a heavy price being parted with. It has been said that "sensationalism in religion does some good, but is balanced by an increase of impatience." True enough ! For, firstly, its products are over-estimated ; secondly, its failures and losses are hidden ; thirdly, as men will not consent to pay dearly for what they can get cheaply, and as they are deceived about the lasting products of "wild-fire" methods, they become impatient of any methods demanding painful and prolonged effort. This principle then was prominent with me : "Permanent and extensive results can only be realized at a high cost of energy." If, after this, any less costly trophies are gained, they are all the more welcome, as lying outside our calculations.

It had pleased God to allow me to see in provincial Methodism churches in which thoughtfulness, warmth, friendliness, self-help, had all been prominent. Can this be reproduced in the heart of the City of cities ? To attempt any such thing was said to be Quixotism. But why not accomplish this ideal ? From the east, the west, the north, and the south the people have poured into London ; and so, after all, she cannot be so *very* unlike the provinces. If every county has given its quota toward the sum total, why should not the qualities found in Cornwall and Devon, Yorkshire and Lancashire, distinguish the Central London Mission ? To call forth these qualities was with me a strongly defined aim.

These positions once taken, other axioms naturally followed. One was, "If the genuine working man be only truly Christianized, he will do more to save England and, through England, the world than any other class of man." The world of letters goes far toward making religion unreal to the higher classes.

The lower fail to present that backbone of character which even the simple terms of the Gospel presuppose. What can be done with a human jelly-fish? Heaven forbid that either higher or lower strata should be left to themselves! But may Heaven most of all forbid that most shall be done for the types of humanity that yield the least return, while those who would yield the best return lie in the cold shade of neglect, and are only taken in hand when it is too late.

The necessities of the working class proper had long been on my heart. A close study of many data had revealed the alarming fact, that no portion of the English-speaking race is so much ignored by religious agencies competent to bless and save as is this. Are there a dozen Methodist congregations in the whole of London where this class is fairly represented? And what church *is* getting hold of them if we are not? Occasionally some minister breaks from his trammels and deals with them personally, but he is looked upon as a phenomenon! They have moral gristle, will-power, courage. They do the most directly toward the actual prosperity of the country. They furnish a larger average of convertible material than any other stratum of society. Yet, say the benevolent, "Let them pay for their religious privileges if they want them. They are able to do it." They are then thrown into the arms of designing agitators or of social teachers who are lacking in ballast. They become truly the "dangerous" class. The classes commonly termed "dangerous" are too flabby, weak-kneed, cowardly, to be fitted into that word. It is those above them who will do damage at any future crisis if they are not accosted by religion and transformed in the spirit of their mind. None will do our cause greater credit if they do but get "the change."

Not that a working-class church, pure and simple, is a thing desirable. My aims extended beyond that. To attract and keep middle-class families was part of my design. They are valuable in performing functions which working-class people could not manage. And my strong hope was to get and retain hold of the feeble and the poor. The first hymn in our hymn-book is a manifesto of doctrine and practice. One of its lines is—

"The humble poor believe."

Our Founder's voice would reproach us if these were left outside our schemes. But can they not be best reached by those who are slightly superior to them in social life? A strong working man becomes a rallying-point for those who are weaker. In a model mothers' meeting a few respectable women influence the slatternly toward tidiness and the thrifless toward forethought. Wesley noticed that "religion's greatest victories are among those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow;" but the work ought not to stop there. The more robust ought to affect savingly and to conserve tenderly those beneath them. A slum church no denomination can build up, though it has frequently been tried; but there are natures in the slums which will crystallize around toilers of a stamp better than their own, and will be vitalized by that to which they cling. Oh, if it were only acknowledged in how many ways the classes of this nation may bless each other! the members of the middle class having their sense of the verity of piety deepened by the testimony of their rougher brethren and sisters; these rougher ones, in their turn, profiting by the financial skill and quiet sympathy of those above them; the lowest class of all meanwhile deriving aid from both, and at the same time giving back that blessing which trustful helplessness ever yields to the patiently helpful. To unite all these in one Bible-loving Church was one great purpose of my Mission. The Society of Friends is bending its powers upon schools for adults on the Lord's Day; the Congregational Union is passing resolutions which bear upon the salvation of the skilled and unskilled labourers; but one may be pardoned for thinking that the church of which he is a minister has extra facilities for dealing with these. In her system she ushers in so much incentive both to meditation and zeal; furnishes healthy restraint and yet honours personal liberty; provides so many offices which may be filled by converted working men; and ought therefore, if a fair field be given and sensible instruments employed, to gather from their households a magnificent harvest. To assist Methodism in doing this was my set determination, and this aim dictated many a method.

"Clear gain for the kingdom of heaven" was also a prominent principle. If the bill of fare causes new residents to

make choice of the Mission as a place for settlement, it is as if they were sent by God ; and they must be noticed, cared for, employed. But there has been, from the beginning, a studied abstention from any courses which might draw from any other houses of worship. We have purposely refrained from some procedures, lest they should make the place too popular with church and chapel-goers ; and, by this means, the very outsiders whom we had anxiously canvassed should be shut out. We did not desire a repetition of Mr. Moody's experience, even upon a small scale. Denominational lines count for so little in London that, unavoidably, we have gained from those newcomers into the locality who were religiously disposed. They have gone the round, and have preferred St. John's Square as a home,—not because of its Methodism, but because of the tone of its services and the kindness of its adherents. The Pastor's feeling about Sabbath observance is well known. The habit of running about to attractive assemblies on the Day of days is most pernicious. It has become a perfect scandal to religion, and worldly people are not slow to perceive it and to point at it. One highly dressed gentleman and lady took a fancy to us, and came a long distance to enjoy themselves. They only met with a scant welcome after the first few times ; for he let it out that in the 'bus one Sunday evening, on his way home, he had offered tracts to the other inmates. They scorned his offer, reminding him of his Sabbath-breaking, and asking him how he squared that with his profession of godliness. Ignorance of common consistency brought upon him a well-deserved rebuke. We have been fallen foul of by religious papers for our refusal to report and advertise, but the avoidance of this deadly and growing evil of Sabbath desecration is a reason amply sufficient. I cannot interfere with personal conscience ; but I can, and will, refrain from all incitement into paths of which my own conscience does not approve. The robbery of other religious bodies is no enrichment of the kingdom of heaven, nor do we intend that any of them shall extenuate their failure by pleading that our success has beggared them. "Beggar my neighbour" is a poor game as between church and church, and, most of all, when it leads to a breach of the Sabbath law.

"Clear gain !" and that on as large a scale as is attainable. That has been our fixed aim. But this has not made us

feverishly desirous of a rapidly growing attendance. The churches have, latterly, been induced to make the numbers present, at a given time, the chief gauge of prosperity. The world, in *its* movements, may hold this notion with propriety ; but has the Church any right to hold it ? We are afflicted with the nostrums propounded by notorious mission-leaders. "It is sublimely easy, after all said and done, to get any place of worship filled to the doors." Just so ! Charming music, loud placarding, the American fashion of sending out startling and mystifying announcements, "no collection and hymn-book provided" services, and the babbling multitude can be got in by shoals ; and what then ? Does not the entire business begin and end with attendance ? Is it not easily gained, easily lost ? May not a forsaken house of prayer be crowded too quickly for any solidifying to take place ? One minister reached a height of notoriety, and gathered large companies together to hear his preaching, by riding a donkey which had thrown all its "mounts" before, and which threw him as well ; but I never heard of any spiritual results, and, if there had been, would even such an end have justified means so foolish and lowering ? Do not vagaries of this sort open the door for the degradation of the Gospel, and its mockery by opponents ? What is only the initial step should never be regarded as the final one. "Be content if you only get them there" is based upon a fallacy. Unless hearts and homes are radically altered, unless human atoms are welded into unity of purpose and strife against sin, of what avail is it that thousands are got within the mission-halls and churches ? I never purposed taking Central London by storm, but rather sought a slow, sure increase of membership.

"Clear gain !" Striking conversions are looked upon and recounted as the greatest gain of all ; and, as rearing up arguments that God's power can save from the uttermost of badness to the uttermost of goodness, so they are. They may be glorified in properly, and cautiously. One who has had a widespread experience for twenty years may be allowed to say that the more striking a conversion is the less likely it is to be abiding. Many a bitter disappointment lies before me, and some whose cases I have been betrayed into allowing to appear in print have turned out the poorest. Then has chagrin filled my soul. Those who, after a good bringing up, steal into the

light will probably prove the most permanent converts. To restore from a prodigal life is a good investment ; but to prevent such a life is a better investment still. After having formerly been employed in forwarding revivals, and, more recently, in prosecuting a quieter work, I give my verdict in favour of the latter. What is done under cover yields the best product. There is more true growth and less inflation. In saying this revivals are not disparaged. By steadily influencing the young, by persuading them to take the right turn at life's transition time, we are avoiding the necessity for a startling awakening in the future. And is not this happiest for all parties ? This aiming at results which shall be solid rather than showy is all but vital in mission work. The very word "mission" suggests to many what is superficial and transient. The sooner we marry the words "mission" and "pastorate" the more I believe the Divine Spirit will be pleased, for "pastorate" signifies a careful shepherding of souls.

There was in me the resolve to have little besides voluntary labour. One lay agent was called to my side at the close of the first twelve months, and he has laboured earnestly and judiciously ever since. All my other colleagues have been unpaid, and have given what scraps of time they could spare from their worldly callings. It was felt that we had better steer clear of any advantage over ordinary missions. To divert money from regular channels that we might spend it lavishly on agents, male and female, on houses for workers which would swallow up cash, would have appeared unfair. Our duties were not so exceptional as to entail so great an expenditure. The problem of the masses is not solved by the multiplication of paid agents. The children of the people must save the people. The more Christians are engaged for their Master the less likelihood will there be of their disagreeing with each other, and of their finding pretexts for grumbling at anything that happens. Some odd personalities present themselves. If it takes all sorts to make a world, it takes a good many sorts to make a church ; but every church member ought to find some place of usefulness. The less of man and the more of God in any achievement the higher is our estimate of it, but the human *must* come in. We may be twitted with the reflection that some of the voluntary agents are led chiefly by a desire to

gratify their minister and friend ; but if we refuse all work except what is done from the highest motive we shall stand in our own light, and shall hinder the coming of God's kingdom. And when these agents are almost exclusively used they are apt to discover their own value, and to let the responsible organizer know that they have found it out ; but they who sacrifice for God's cause, without fee or reward, are worth humouring and bearing with. Multiply paid men and women, and the others slacken speed. Besides, bad blood is apt to arise between the two orders ; for those who receive remuneration are accused of giving themselves airs and of monopolizing the meetings, and they in their turn retort that the voluntary workers are exacting and unjust.

The principle that all must go shares in the expenses of the Mission was insisted upon. The continuance of seat rents became part of the plan of operations. This rental of sittings in the house of prayer has been roundly and variously abused. But how is it to be done without ? It works badly in places. Friction is generated because the seat paid for is looked upon as personal property. But how are the expenses for heating, lighting, caretaking, and repairs to be met ? The more meetings the more expense for coal, gas, cleaning, wear and tear. Some of those who rail against this rental are themselves the poorest givers and least reliable workers, and all are inconsiderate. If friends desire to contribute in this form toward the trust funds, and at the same time secure the privilege of a family seat in the sanctuary they love best, let them not be wantonly repelled. Had this order of things been given up we should have lost some valuable helpers. But if seat holders are not in their place at the opening minute let the rule be that places cannot be kept, and let all favouritism be frowned upon. If there has been any sign of this at our evening service, I have come down from the rostrum and said to the brother in charge of the pew-opening, " Fill up that pew right away. *I take all the responsibility.*" The tariff was lowered twenty-five per cent., and reduction of price was made for quantity taken. Partly through this action the number of sittings taken has increased. There has been no pressure laid upon the people, however. The pew doors were taken off without any one objecting very loudly, and that gave to the chapel an appearance of freedom it did not before possess. The system will

always be a cause of trouble, but with us the trouble is fairly overbalanced by monetary and other advantages.

In pursuance of this principle of self-support, church dues have been expected from the people. These include weekly and quarterly gifts in the society classes; two collections per annum in those classes; an offertory from pew to pew at every Sabbath service; the up-keep of the Home and Foreign Missionary Funds; of the Mission Band, Sunday School, and other organizations. In addition to this, the plate has been held at the door at our Social and Temperance assemblies; and collecting cards have been filled up in aid of the Christmas Dinners for the Poor. A "give nothing" religion has been held up to ridicule among us, and deserves to be. Not long ago a man left a church where liberal giving was inculcated, and settled at an unsectarian hall. Questioned, after a few months, as to how he was getting on, he replied: "Oh, they are such a nice lot! I do like them! So good they are! They have never asked me for a penny since I went among them!" Judged by his standard of niceness and goodness, there are grave defects in the London Central Mission. Yet, during the whole period of my ministry here, not a whisper of complaint has ever reached me. Those who favour us and favour themselves by their presence know when they have a good thing, and are willing to pay for it.

Another principle adopted and tenaciously kept to was that all social efforts must be kept rigidly subsidiary to the conversion of souls, and to the upbuilding alike of old members and new converts in the truths of salvation. This will admit of an extended exposition at a later stage.

It was alleged, as a fatal flaw in my appointment, that no formulated programme had been announced. But to trumpet forth a set of ready-made intentions would have been in the last degree unwise. To hold a full-blown programme would have been just as foolish. If the principles and aims are there—these constitute by themselves certain faint outlines—the rest can be inserted as the necessities of the work reveal themselves. Environment must be allowed to do its part toward the shaping of organism.

It is high time that the results of our Mission were specified, if only for the sake of the writer's own peace of soul.

Have the principles already indicated proved workable?

That is a crucial question for a public man. If answered in the negative, his life-work falls into ruins.

“ Who knows how far high failure
Overleaps the bounds of low successes ? ”

But even *high* failure is bitter to the true soul—is fruitful of disastrous reaction to him who has given ungrudging labour to ensure success. An Eastern traveller purchased at a great price a genuine Damascus blade, and proudly took it everywhere in his journeyings. Wishing one day to show it to some friends, he tugged at the hilt, and drew out, to his consternation, a piece of hoop iron. Some Arab thief had dexterously abstracted the sword, and substituted the worthless metal. And who in this world can be more wretched than he who, having for years looked upon principles for which he has laid down suffering and self-denial as highly tempered truth, discovers upon trial that, as by a dire enchantment, his treasured sword, his weapon for offence or defence, has become a something of no worth; that the steel has gone, and the hoop iron only is there; that, in short, he has nothing that will stand the conflicts of Time and the tests of Eternity? Such wretchedness, I can assure my readers, is not mine. Aims have been justified by results. The goodness of the principles has been guaranteed by the efficiency of their operation.

CHAPTER IX.

RESULTS OF OUR MISSION.

IT is told of the clerical master of a boarding-school, that on a given Sabbath he took his boys to a church in which repairs had been going on. During the service one of the walls fell in, and there was a wild jostle for life. The master contrived to save his own skin, and then, remembering his charge, he wrung his hands and shrieked, "Oh, my boys ! my boys ! I will give anybody ten shillings who will rescue my boys !" As there were forty of them, the appraisement of their value was just threepence per head. They felt that rather a cheap estimate of their worth had been formed in their teacher's mind, and loved him none the more for it. How different is the Bible estimate of the value of redeemed men and women ! The soul, whose salvation all heaven rejoices over, may well be held dear by every devoted Christian. I am taught by the Book to look on every child of man as my other self, and, in that measure, to prize his or her conversion. It is the high value so placed on religious results which goes far to account for the profusion of theories concerning soul-saving methods which are now before the Christian public. There is a natural wish to know what these vaunted methods have effected. Hence the numerous reports drawn up and circulated. Hence, too, the temptation, in drawing up a report, to overstate. Both the charlatan and the too sanguine theorist abuse the confidence of anxious gullible religionists. The disparity between the publication and the reality is known only to those who have been able to act as scrutineers. And the information filtrates very slowly among the general mass of believers. The office of "informer" is always an odious one, and we cannot wonder that those who know how stretched

are some of these reports, shrink from turning their bull's-eye upon them. And so the concoction of narratives which beguile the charitable goes on all but uncorrected.

In speaking of results gained by the London Central Mission, I have the sure knowledge that those who have known this Mission the best think most of the extent and solidity of what has been gained. However graphic the description, they will enthusiastically agree with it. So many nice theories have proved impracticable, that wise men are rightfully wary of all that have not yet been reduced to practice; while they are just as trustful and thankful toward all that have made good their profession. In that category ours are found.

The confession may be frankly made that some of our tactics have failed, and that a portion of what appeared good result has slipped through our fingers. What thrilling stories might be written of converted wife-beater and prize-fighter and sceptic, if only their defection had not to be sorrowed over! If we could only tell of the abiding renewal of a goodly number of those who dwell in the old shaky property near our workshop; but, out of many who have expressed themselves as having been blessed, I can put my fingers on but few who have proved satisfactory converts. Either they would rather spend their money in beer than contribute toward the work of God; or they have come in their distress, obtained assistance, testified that they had learned to read the kindness of God through the kindness of His people, and then forgotten all about it; or, after a brief display of earnestness, have gone back to their wallowing, and are now hugging the very chains from which they rejoiced to have been freed. All this is disheartening. But it is no new thing in the world. Jesus Christ set Himself to keep all He could, but He faced the fact that He would lose much even of what promised well. The rushing tide of London carries on its bosom many wrecked natures. They drift within reach, are clutched at by those whose footing is secure, dragged upon the rock of safety, and, just when hopes are highest, slip down again into the waters, are strangled by the currents, and disappear amidst the foam.

But others are held and housed. There is nothing more common in fellowship meetings and in private converse than to hear scores of them say that they thank God they ever

came inside St. John's Square. Any success won in this neighbourhood should be looked upon as equal to much greater success elsewhere, from the fact that hindrances so severe abound.

Each first Sunday in March we have had a whole day of thanksgiving for the blessing given since the transference of the place to the London Mission, and each year has witnessed increased reasons for congratulation and praise. During these three years every week has brought its evidences that God was in our midst. The motto text of one Thanksgiving Service was, "As we have heard so have we seen;" and the responses of the audience left no doubt of their belief that all they had ever read or heard of was matched by what they beheld around them. But they were not satisfied, being possessed by a spirit of holy discontent. Unless the additions are constant and large they become dejected. This dejection itself drives us to new prayerfulness and ingenious devices for winning souls.

We may deal first with the arithmetic of the matter. It is entirely admitted that results may be judged by tests other than those of membership. The Class-meeting system, for reasons which need not here be pointed out, excludes some true Christians from the visible fold. In estimating the Christians in attendance on the ministry, at least twenty per cent. may be added to the actual number of Church members. We have now as attendants at Class well-nigh six hundred names. That is the top figure in Methodist London. From being at the tail end we have little by little overlapped all the rest and taken first place. This is wonderful and unprecedented. The question has been many times repeated, "But do your members *attend* Class." Well, the average is between sixty and seventy per cent. per week, and when met by the Pastor for tickets it is higher than that. At the ordinary Sabbath evening Sacrament the table, which takes in twenty-three persons, is filled twenty-one times. The morning Sacrament is also attended by a long succession of communicants. The Lord's Table is not patronized as it should be by modern Nonconformists, and therefore our case is all the more gladdening. At the Lovefeast there must have been present seven hundred and fifty persons, and as many as sixty-nine have spoken in the hour. The Week Evening Service averages one hundred and fifty, and the Prayer

Meeting about eighty ; and this in London, where people are proverbially reluctant to attend week-day gatherings. The spacious, though ill-ventilated, schoolroom has been constantly packed at the Social Evening on the Monday, and fairly filled at the Temperance Meeting on the Saturday. The Sunday School is so crowded that thoughtful parents have made objections to send their children, and the officials and teachers have a sense of suffocation through breathing the impure air. The Lecture Hall is tolerably full at the Mothers' Meeting. The Men's Bible Class has a membership of a hundred and fifty, the Women's of seventy, and the list of members would have been longer if suitable rooms had been available. On Sunday morning the chapel is three-fifths full,—good indeed for a working-class constituency. The larger portion of those present are men. At night just about every seat is occupied, above as well as below. The heat and discomfort are such that we hardly dare put seats in the aisles, except at special times. Of the Foreign as well as the Home Missionary Meeting the speakers have said privately, "By far the best attendance I have seen in London." For the congregation on the Sabbath evening "motley" is the only word. Romanists, sceptics, nondescripts, habitual neglecters of public worship, persons of every fashion of upbringing, are represented there. The responsibility is weighty, but it is helpful to the preacher when he realizes what an odd assortment of hearers he has. He feels pretty certain of hitting somebody. Even stray bullets often find a fitting billet.

All this is like a dream to those who witnessed the decadence and despondency of three years ago. The contrast between past and present could not easily be sharper than it is. Personally, I am getting used to the wonder and glory of it ; but at times, when I think of the long struggle, the sleepless nights, the depression that *would* settle upon me, and then look at the living witnesses of Jesus' power who are now by the hundred under my pastoral charge, I too stand like a man in a dream, and ask, "*Can all this be true ?*" It would be indiscreet to give many personal instances of the marvels of conversion vouchsafed to us. The portraits would be seized upon instantly by the people to whom this book is dedicated. It is not prudent to do much particularizing ; but some typical, trusted cases may be laid stress upon as prodigies of grace.

The old Greek saying was, "He who sins against the light is hurt beyond hope of cure." Even at that period the grievous harm that comes through long-continued resistance of truth was plainly understood. When an intelligent man, during a course of years, has grossly sinned against the clearest laws, and declined the most patent injunctions of religious duty, there is nothing more miraculous than the transformation of his interior life, and the reformation of his outer conduct. We have been allowed to behold this great sight.

To break away the nature from that heredity which issues in depravity is another Gospel sign. One of the most gentle and pious ladies of the last century had as her parents two of the most depraved persons then living. She was justly looked upon as a living marvel. In our collection of converts we can go a long way toward matching this. Ancestral evils have been conquered. A good which, from all the laws of descent, appeared most improbable has come to pass.

Women there are who, after months have gone, fear to believe that their husbands *are* renewed in heart, lest it should all pass away and leave matters worse than they were before. It seems too good to be true. They become over-anxious from very dread that the propitious tokens of self-respect and domestic affection should vanish as strangely as they came.

The power of impure reading is notorious. If it once gets a hold, that hold requires some shaking off. But there have been those who have rummaged every drawer and receptacle for the poison that had entered their moral constitution, saying as they have searched, "It has done me plenty of harm. I'll take care it doesn't curse anybody else;" and they have destroyed the perilous stuff in the fire.

Some who are now with us had gone very far wrong. Few have any idea to what lengths they went. When it has been confided to me there has been the exclamation, "Well! I never guessed that he'd been like that!" or, "Who'd have thought that she'd been that sort of woman."

The confirmed Sabbath-breaker, who had not entered a place of worship for more than a dozen years, has become a reverent worshipper, and, by his mechanical genius, has fashioned glass and wood and brass into an elaborately contrived case and machine. A penny in the slot sets everything in motion. Wheels go round, a fisherman sitting by the water-side begins

to twitch his rod, and behind it all is the daintily painted landscape. Three hundred pennies were taken by this contrivance at our late Bazaar ; and all this was from the hand and brain of one who, three short years back, as the saying goes, "neither cared for God nor devil." His fine natural powers are to-day at the service of the Church of Christ.

A man of fifty-eight gets up in a Lovefeast, and tells that he has only been a Christian twelve months. With a voice shaken with sorrow, he narrates his previous history. His home was broken up ; but, through the smiling invitation of one who owes her own godliness to the Mission, he comes to the Temperance Meeting, and hears there the over-brimming experience of some pious soldiers. "Ah!" he goes on, "it wasn't the *tract* she had in her hand that brought me ; it was the smile. The kind word of a good woman means a lot to a fellow when he's down in the world." He signed the pledge, made the Lord his friend, and now, with the wife whom his evil conduct had driven away once more by his side, he can tell a rapt and weeping company his simple, touching narrative, closing up with a reference to his perfectly happy home.

An aged man who had been lonely in busy London made his way into our chapel, invited by one of our humblest workers. He was kindly treated. Not only was he respectfully ushered into a seat (our door-keepers are the very pink of politeness), but a hymn-book was handed to him, with the hymn found for him. He could not make this out, for it had rarely been his lot to receive such marks of respect. After a time the old man timidly placed his soul in the hands of his Saviour, and when, after a few months of communion with us, his hour of departure came, he died with "God bless you" as his last words. They were spoken to his beloved Class-leader, but were really the blessing of a dying man upon the agency through which this wonder of goodness—the salvation of one who had passed the threescore and ten—had been brought to pass.

Did that man who used to haunt the reeking tap-room and the skittle-alley ever think that the Bible would some day become his reference book and guide? And did he whose past has been so chequered, and who was accustomed to spend most of his earnings in drinking and treating, ever imagine that, his own face radiant with happiness, he would teach some day a

class of boys in a Sabbath School ? Did he, smart craftsman, who has wrecked his bodily health by riotous living, ever surmise that, through Jesus Christ, a new joyous world would open out to him ? Verily, this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes !

The more variety there is in religious results, the stronger is the evidence that it is the work of the Holy Ghost. As He has diversities of operation, we should look out for diversities of effect. If the converts have somewhere about the same pattern of experience all round, there is room for fear that there is more of man than of God in it all. We have not to complain because variety is wanting. Some of the cases of conviction of sin have been as deep as any spoken of in Wesley's Journals. One stalwart fellow declares that "he *did* thrash his heart, and no mistake." Relatives and friends were puzzled to know what was the matter with some of these convicted ones. When the man in Cheshire roamed and roared in his misery, he was thought to be suffering from some bodily disorder, and camomile tea was forced in large quantities upon him. But the peace of God in his soul put him right, and he soon showed his independence of camomile tea. Some of our seekers after pardon have shown symptoms which might have led to a diagnosis equally incorrect ; but, once the Balm of Gilead applied, other medicine has been at a discount. Whereas others have glided imperceptibly into the light, nor are they harassed with doubts through not having experienced convulsions of soul. They can repeat over and over, "Jesus is mine."

The inquiry-room has been used on Sunday nights and at other times. If the vestry walls could speak they would have some glad tales to tell. But much ingathering has been secured, especially among the men, altogether outside inquiry-room methods. At one time the Pastor is sent for to see a stricken soul, and there in the dwelling-room, during his talk and prayer, God's mercy is accepted and rejoiced in. At another time the news is whispered about that a man has knelt down for the first time in his wife's presence, or a woman in that of her husband ; and that this has excited the remark from the one witness, "Well ! if you're going *that* road, *I* may as well go the same way ;" and husband and wife have bowed before God side by side.

In a large hotel almost every servant has become a Christian. When changes in the staff occur, the new domestics are brought under saving influences, and a devotional meeting is held among themselves by the servants from week to week.

The very illumination over the chapel door has been used of God. "The message of God's love is for you; come in and hear it," is the inscription upon it. A woman who is a great-grandmother, and who for half a century has wanted "something"—she hardly knew what—sees the words, and resolves to accept the invitation in hope of obtaining rest. She is opposed by a near and dear relative, but persists in her intention. At the Lord's Table she finds what she has so earnestly desired, and ere long her daughter chooses the same excellent way, and is blessed at the very place she had been inclined to despise.

A working man from another part of the City is wandering up and down Clerkenwell on the Sunday. Things have gone wrong with him, and his heart is full of rage against God. He looks mockingly at the words, "God's *love*," and, half defiantly, strays in. He meets with a friendly reception, is accosted shyly by one who himself has been richly saved some time previously, gives up his hatred of God's ways, and tells us all that he has become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

The open-air service is being held. A Christless working man is passing by. His feelings are tender, for he has just lost a child, and, as he looked at the little dead face, there arose within him a great hunger to meet that child again. He listens to the speaker outside the chapel, and is easily persuaded to come inside, is deeply moved, and yields to the Spirit of God. That is not the only instance in which the loss of a child has become the main instrument in leading to happy consistent membership with our church. A hard-headed man lingers in the outskirts of the crowd, enters God's house with the rest, has old memories revived, acknowledges what a poor lapsed mortal he is, and, in his quiet steadfast way, sets his face toward the Cross.

Lumpish men, with faces about as expressive as a block of wood, are strangely brightened in appearance now that they have "Christ in them, the hope of glory." They look as pleasant as a lilac tree in flower. Sodden women, who appear to have lost every spark of immortality, get their features regulated

and enlivened by making Jesus their personal Saviour. Of one of these I heard it said "she didn't know Sunday from Monday. Her house was dirty. Her children were growing up anyhow. And now look at her and her family—so clean, so fond of the meetings! I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it." Children of drunken parents, fatherless and motherless youths and maidens, as well as other young people, are numbered among the recipients of spiritual good. Home-grown is always best-grown. The best fruits and vegetables I ever tasted came out of my own garden. Those lettuces, and cabbages, and kidney beans, and strawberries, and raspberries were costly, but they were of my own rearing, and that gave additional flavour to them. A three years' ministry witnesses a marked change in the stature and ideas of young people. Those who were children ripen rapidly toward manhood and womanhood. They do pair off too early—that must be yielded—but they had better keep company with each other than go to a music-hall or a street corner to find their partners. Boy-and-girl courtships have often turned out happy marriages, and they are the more likely to be a blessing if there is a mutual attachment to the house of prayer. We are familiar with many vestiges of this attachment among our Sabbath scholars and others who are in early life. I never knew a school or congregation where so small a proportion of the "younger end"—as they are called in Cotton county—are led astray by the Evil One.

It is true that, just as they arrived at a critical age, some of them were beginning to go wrong; but they were savingly reached, and are delightfully religious. Others, with more years upon their heads, had suffered from strong natural tendencies, and had gone some distance on the high road to perdition—had begun to give way to drunken and licentious habits; but the downrush was stopped, and they are progressing in the opposite direction. Persons coming in from the country had commenced yielding to the prevalent temptations of London, but were prevailed upon to pay us a passing visit. This led to their settling in a safe anchorage, much to their good and to ours. Men and women have come under the shadow of adversity. The ways of life have been darkened for them. But they now affirm that their trouble is not half so heavy to bear, for they have found such homeliness and comfort

at St. John's Square, and so many precious friendships there! That, in itself, is no mean result.

Many of the worthier poor have been unearthed, and some of the unworthier. We have one large Society Class made up entirely of very poor but happy women,—and poor men are scattered among the other classes,—to their own manifold profiting. Among us is brought to fulfilment the prophecy concerning Zion : “The firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in her.” If we have not rescued from low living so many as we could have wished, we have prevented a large number from becoming sots and ne'er-do-weels, and from replenishing the slums at no distant date. From the girl who in her delirium praises her Redeemer in words learned at our meetings for children, to the middle-aged man who, from being a broken-backed sinner and a hard case generally, is now a cheerful husband and father, chivalrous and thoughtful towards the other sex,—these are extremes wide enough ; and between them are lying quite a multitude of beautifully varied examples of the greatness of God’s work in stony Central London. Surely here are diversities sufficient to satisfy any candid inquirer that He who is the Spirit of variety, and not of sameness, has been Head and Centre of this successful crusade.

But we have not reached the last of our tests, nor do we wish to be spared any fair ordeal. “Have the people a pleasant religion ?” All piety *ought* to wear a pleasant appearance. Let a worldly old man tell what *he* thinks. One Sunday morning he stood near the gates when the service was over. An acquaintance came out and noticed how interested he was in taking stock of the friends as they smiled and chatted and greeted each other. Says the chapel-goer, “Have you been in ?” “No, not I !” “Then what are you hanging about here for when they’re coming out ?” “Well,” was the answer, “I like to see the happy faces.” That illustrates the reputation we have, and the quality that strikes a stranger. One of those who had come from darkness to light was told by his former friends that he looked as if he had had a fortune left him. No wonder, if his story could be disclosed. After such density about religion and such prejudice against it, he ought to prize it. Oh that he and others like him may continue to that day ! Men who have not been to a house of God for five, ten, fifteen

years, remark as they scan the congregation, "If *this* is being good, it is not what I thought it was! I don't care how soon I get the same sort of article." What are Rotten Row and Hyde Park in happiness compared with Clerkenwell Methodism!

"Are the frequenters of this once deserted sanctuary attentive, thoughtful, eager for the truth? They should be if God's Kingdom is in them, for they are mostly drawn from the artisans and the well-taught poor. Referring to some elegant persons among his listeners, Mr. Wesley observed, "They were as attentive as if they had been Kingswood colliers." Wesley's colliers are equalled in attention by the curious menagerie who attend my ministry. They even forget to cough during the sermon, and that when the winter weather is at its worst. Akin to this is the regularity of attendance. It is a sight to excite pleasure when on a wet night the line of umbrellas is seen filing through the narrow passage by which, on one side, our Mission is approached. I never knew a congregation so little affected by the weather, albeit the ordinary Londoner is more sensitive to wet and cold than is his rustic brother.

"Is there an unaffected and a practical kindness?" Who better than the Pastor knows that there is? I become cognizant of deeds of kindness; of the sharing of joys and sorrows; of the formation of golden friendships betwixt family and family, individual and individual. The ailing in body are shepherded. The people know each other in the street as well as in the aisle and the vestry. Policemen, postmen, senior scholars, and little children greet me and each other right cheerily. "St. John's Square" is the common bond of union and fraternal interest.

"Is there mental growth?" Ay, that there is! Young men, naturally and morbidly retiring, under the spur of duty, and without losing their modesty, come to the front and quickly establish a name for dependableness. Their latent talents are developed, and they become a wonder to themselves. Nor is this growth confined to our young manhood. Its signs sit on many a brow, and reveal themselves in the manner and the conversation.

"Is there social improvement?" Without doubt there is. The back room is changed for the model dwelling. The untidy home is turned into a model of orderliness. The careless

become house-proud. The unkempt exhibit nicely parted hair and a clean skin. The forlorn in dress and demeanour save a few shillings and get a cheap "rig out" at the pawnshop. And then, forsooth, the reproach is laid at our door, "What a respectable congregation you have! Do you call *this* a Mission Chapel?" Please understand, ladies and gentlemen, that a *Mission* Chapel is a place attended only by the tag-rag and bob-tail of society, and that they must be expected to continue in this condition. Just so! One of our plain-spoken men was challenged by a well-dressed individual who was evidently going the round of the Missions, and who pointed to some neatly attired girls on the chapel steps. "Do you call *these* Mission converts?" "Yes," said our good fellow; "and but for this place they'd likely enough have been dancing and yelling round a street organ."

"Is there the spirit of prayer?" Who can gainsay that there is? Scene in a City square. Time, midnight. Enter policeman and watchman. Man in blue wants to have a word with the other custodian about his soul's salvation, but hardly knows how to edge it in. Watchman: "I want to get off on Sunday." Policeman: "Why so, mate?" Watchman: "Oh, I reckon on going to chapel." Policeman: "What chapel?" Watchman: "Wesleyan Chapel, Old Ford." Policeman: "Glory be to God! I'm a Wesleyan; I go to St. John's Square. Let's have a prayer-meeting together." No sooner said than started. This is in harmony with the trend of thought and habit amongst us. It is easy to preach to a praying people. They lift me up when my heart is overburdened with the care of souls.

"Are the people generous?" The collection book, the quarterly meeting book, the Treasurer's books for the local funds are the best references here. Offertory, six guineas per Sunday. Class-money at the rate of a hundred and forty pounds per annum. Seat-rents, eighty pounds per annum. Efforts, regular and extra, bring the sum of the givings to not one penny less than a thousand pounds per annum. This is from a congregation many of whom have long spells out of work, or large families, or high rents; and which is almost exclusively made up of the labouring classes. If they cannot give, they are willing to work. One ancient lady brought to our Bazaar a many-coloured quilt, with seventeen

hundred pieces in it. What hours of toil that meant to that feeble, half-blind woman ! Two others came near this with their handiwork. Artificial flowers, bead-braiding, babies' frocks, wooden stools, and divers other articles, useful and ornamental, came from those who had no more money to give, but had a little time on their hands which they would fain use for the Lord. Flower services and harvest thanksgivings have but farther proved this generosity.

"Are they grateful for anything that is done for them ?" Very much so ! A man, who had got good, went for a week to his country home, and returned laden with flowers for his Pastor's household ; while another brought a small cargo of newly gathered nuts. A poor woman, who had been aided in the day of trouble, gave a faint ring one evening. It is the Pastor's birthday to-morrow, and she's somehow got wind of this. She leaves a beautiful card, and hurries away as if afraid of what she has done. A youth feels that death is near. How shall he show his love to the one who has striven to cheer him during his long illness ? He fixes on a plan, for he's heard me say that "I've never had time even to hear the 'Messiah,' and that I've to put off enjoying the good music till I get to the New Jerusalem." So his request to his parents is that tickets for the Albert Hall performance shall be procured and sent. Before that day comes I have read over him the sweet and solemn Burial Service, and, amid all the bursts of Messiah choruses, I seem to see his face and to hear his voice. And so I might go on, to show the grateful feelings and actions of these newly garnered servants of Jesus.

"Is the work steady ?" Steady as time itself. There is nothing of the fit and start about it. For thirty months there has been a gradual accretion of converts. I said in public that if, on any given week, souls were not saved, I must put crape on my hat, in sign of mourning, but, so far, there has been no reason to do any such thing. Hardly a street or set of buildings, big or little, but what has yielded results. For some of them we waited long and worked hard, but they came at last.

No marvel that the very dust and stones of the chapel are gloried in when the blessing has been as it has. Some, who have removed for the sake of bodily health, return for the sake of spiritual health ; for they assert lovingly that they can find no other place like the one they left. During many travels up

and down England, I have met with no work more satisfactory in its results, with none which had more plainly upon it the heavenly imprint. Of rant and wildfire we have had none. Noisy, forward persons, those pests of Missions, nicknamed "Mudlarks" by our friends, we have resolutely snubbed, until they have taken themselves away. The solidifying process has been always going on. Our church is a growing power in the locality. Onlookers believe in it, and the fruits speak for themselves. Inmates of godless homes are won over by the all-round righteousness of our membership. If we gain one in a family, we almost invariably gain one or two more. Christians, who pay us a cursory visit, go away convinced, from all that they see and hear, that the entire business is of the Holy Ghost. Nor are we without intelligence that those who have to locate themselves in some other field, after having been with us for a time, carry the fire with them, and try to reproduce the principles and effects of the Central London Mission.

CHAPTER X.

OUR METHODS; RELIGIOUS.

I HAVE seen it stated that "nothing riles people more than to see the objects they desire accomplished by means other than their own." That is paltry. It may be true of human nature, but it ought not to be true of human nature as amended by grace. There is no claim in this chapter that our results could not possibly have been attained by any other channels. But if we trust most those methods which have, in our hands, proved themselves most trustworthy, and select these for cordial recommendation to other workers—who can cavil? This is not intended as a text-book of Evangelism, or a manual for general application. It may be needful with other aims and surroundings to use methods quite distinct from ours. There is always room in Christian effort for sanctified common sense. Unless the natural is fully used we have no right to expect the fulness of the supernatural. Christ honoured truth by consenting to employ every lawful agency in getting it home.

We were driven to the adoption of certain lines. We had to build from the bottom, and "make haste slowly" consequently became the order of the day. Rushing tactics were out of the question. Sapping and mining were essential to safe advances. Where the foundation is already deeply laid, and forward positions are occupied, rapid movements and quick dashes may be the best. With us it was the antithesis of this. It was hard to disappoint kindly enthusiasts, but what else could be done?

Central London became my world. For two years I avoided all contact with outside platforms and even with fellow-ministers. For fear of distraction all religious papers were

pushed on one side, and to all comment I was deaf and blind. To choke off spies and interviewers was a sacred obligation. Absolute absorption and concentration alone would ensure the completion of the delegated task. Many months after the inauguration of the Mission, when the census was taken, there were but two hundred and seventy persons in the chapel on the Sunday evening. All this meant a long trial of the faith and patience of the Missioner and his helpers. Nothing but a firm belief in the rectitude and wisdom of the methods employed could have supported us through this earlier period. At times murmuring arose, and division of opinion was imminent. A plan more daring, or the acceptance of the "fireworks" policy, was hankered after by some of our most loyal supporters. They are satisfied now that to hold on as we did was the wisest thing, but the popularity in some quarters of another style of thing threatened to create dissension among us some time back.

Every method has been taken up with a view to tangible results. "No padding," "Nothing simply for show," have been our precepts. There was no purpose to keep everything at fever heat. Where this is done reaction must set in. Chronic excitement is good neither for the body nor the soul. If Christians are being perpetually strung up, they eventually become badly unstrung. If ever we have had a sharp burst for special meetings, care has been exercised in steadyng matters down again.

Printing has paid. This is one way of sinking capital, and, if a large trade is to be worked up, capital must be sunk. The distribution of printed matter has prevented the rank and file from rusting, and has kept our work always before the masses. A hundred distributors of tracts have visited given districts, either once a week, or fortnight, or month, and have reached a population of twenty-five thousand. "Joyful News" placards and coloured bills have half hidden the frontage of our premises. We tried to get boards with our announcements upon them in public places, but this was rather disappointing. Tickets of a "taking" appearance have been in the hands of a Public-house Brigade. Nervous women as well as bold men have stood, with their ammunition in their hands, near the gin-shops, and have even entered them, in order to wean away their clients and decoy them to the religious service. These

tickets thus dealt out have been so framed as to catch the eye and excite curiosity, without being at all low in taste. Had we specimens of all our printing an interesting scrap-book might be got up. Two or three of our truest men have gone so far as to take sandwich boards when anything extra was on foot. The experience of one of these is amusing. "I went out feeling funny and sheepish. My dignity took some swallowing, I assure you. Before long I met a man whom I knew. Thinking I was hard up, and had taken to this mode of getting a living, he cast upon me a pitying look, said nothing, but passed on. Then I met another friend, and he was seized with a sudden desire to study astronomy. Then a publican's sandwich man came to me and said, 'What cheer, old pal?' And I replied gloomily, 'What cheer?' 'Ah,' says he, 'you shouldn't go about for them religious coves. Come with me, and you'll get more money and a drop of drink in the bargain.'" "Anything for Christ" is a sentiment that has had other exponents among those of our supporters who have set themselves to advertise the Mission and to spread good reading among the vitiated, and poverty-stricken, and indifferent. Thus by keeping ourselves before the promiscuous public we are sure to gain. One is mysteriously brought under good impressions; another is so circumstanced as to have created within an unwonted tenderness of heart; another has a sudden reminder of the uncertainty of life or an arousing of holy thoughts long slumbering. Then they think of the place so often forced upon their notice. Or perhaps throughout the summer they have been compelled to hear of this place, and when winter comes they drop in to spend an evening. The ice once broken visit after visit is paid, the man or woman is noticed, followed up, and their salvation is at last assured.

All this leads up to the high and central position that, if God's cause is to prosper, all must take a share in the concern. Every method has been shaped with that consideration before us. The first requirement is that the chief officer shall do soldier's duty in addition to that of leadership. "Westward Ho" contains the description of a battle between the crews of British and Spanish ships. The Spanish captain stands on the poop watching, ordering, his hand on his sword-hilt, but taking no part in the conflict. The Englishman, on the contrary, is heaving and hauling and cheering his men,

taking a personal share in the contest. There is no need to say which side wins. Captaincy in God's host is the more effective if every one feels that the leader's heart is in his work, and that he takes his part in drudgery and tiredness. With this before me, every meeting, whether for prayer, or social purposes, or committee purposes, has been scrupulously attended, and there has been a hearty performance of the by no means easy duties of the Pastorate. Mr. Wesley tells his readers that "by repeated experiments we find that, though a man preach like an angel, he will neither collect nor preserve a Society that is collected without visiting from house to house." And yet one of the saddest signs of these times is the decay of the Pastorate. From the chair editorial of the religious paper it is boldly proclaimed that, henceforth, the Pastor must play second to the Evangelist. But no agencies whatever can make up for the neglect of pastoral functions,—nay more, this neglect will seriously cripple all other agencies. The formation of a Christian Workers' Association will mean nothing in a few months if the one who ought to be at its head leaves all the rough monotonous toil to his associates. "Anything to avoid personal painstaking dealing with souls" appears to be the unspoken principle of many officers in the army of Christ. If the ones are to save the ones it must be a case of "follow my leader." It is hard work to find work for others, but he can do it best who is himself bearing the burden and heat of the day. A minister *may* keep his fingers on everything, but if they are not themselves toil-stained, his touch will lose its thrilling force. And here, let me say, that the results which have given me most joy, which have stocked my speech-list with telling incidents, have been won by house-to-house and life-to-life dealing with men. God has put individuals on my heart. They have been prayed for, sought out, written to, and, with scarcely an exception, soundly converted. I have learned to copy Him who dealt with Martha in one way and with Mary in another, and to vary my treatment of single souls as their needs require. When Jesus told His disciples that they were to fish for men and to catch them, they little thought of the amount of study, self-restraint, perseverance, that was meant by this; but they found it out afterwards, as every faithful Pastor has to do.

Attention to trivial matters is helpful in the gathering of

inomentum and the winning of substantial spoils. The history of the London Central Mission is a history of the extensive use of little things.

Commonplace agents have helped on the work greatly. The Churches have made a grand mistake in trusting so much to the talented and brilliant of their sons and daughters. They should have relied more, for purposes of propagandism, upon those of ordinary mould, or even below the average in age and speech-power. Poor widows have trailed their tired feet from door to door and up steep steps. Boys have ringed together and have drawn other boys into their circle ; and the same has happened with the girls. With what modest pride do these young people usher a new companion into the inquiry-room ! With what a look of happy consciousness do the children on the Sunday escort a fresh recruit to the Secretary's desk ! And when some quiet member introduces a friend into the class there is a suffusion of pleasure upon the features. The spirit of labour pervades the whole Church. I never met with so small a percentage of drones. A man upon whom I one day called looked at me with a peculiar expression, and almost sharply remarked, " If you think you're going to get me to do anything you're mistaken." " Wait until I ask you," was all the reply I made. At the Covenant Service he obtained light and joy, enrolled himself with us, soon asked for some position of usefulness, and is now a regular glutton, never knowing when he has done enough, and doing everything in first-rate form. Stewards, Superintendents, Teachers, Leaders, Secretaries, afford repetitions of the same class of story. The promotion of some to office gave rise to anxious thought. Their fitness for their posts was not known. They were put in with hope that fitness would reveal itself. Rarely, indeed, has there been reason to deplore the choice made. In Hayti there appear to be half as many generals as soldiers, and in one South American city it is always safe to call a passer-by " Doctor," for most of the male citizens possess a degree of some kind ; and at St. John's Square there are few that have not received honour and praise. Anyhow, there are more corporals and sergeants than there are privates. " Before the Mission started," remarked a working man, " I was a nobody here ; but now I am a somebody." That man has brought more into membership than any one on the ground.

This is the result of the recently born sense of personal responsibility. Yet it will never do to make Christian workers feel that they are being used as tools. Farewell to progress if any idea like that finds entrance ! A critic of General Gordon makes this remark, "Tools like to be praised." Gordon therefore said, By the help of my hammer, plane, and nails I have made this splendid box. That is how he used his underlings, and then complimented them." But Gordon did more than that. He dealt with men as men, and made them understand that, before God, they stood as he stood. That has been my honest desire during our onerous experiment. The people, young and old, have been talked to as partners, and our Mission has been dubbed, by the lips of its leaders, "The St. John's Square Wesleyan Co-operative Society."

We have had the places providentially supplied in all the branches of our organization. It is encouraging to go into the School and find that very few teachers are absent. Every agency has been made to strengthen the hands of the rest, as far as this could be managed. No one part has been knowingly separated from the remaining parts, and all have yielded a proportion toward the aggregate of good.

For the sake of information, I often ask the question, "How came *you* to come to the Square?" and as often as not there is a reference to some modest brother or sister who has been assiduous in inviting and calling. If we have a secret it is here : children who attend the Band of Hope or weekly children's meeting have attracted their parents ; neighbour has brought neighbour, and householder has prevailed upon lodger ; tract distributor has refused to be put off with a negative, and on the twentieth attempt has succeeded. Among our brightest converts are some who have been fairly shamed into entering our sanctuary by the repeated attentions of those who have made it their home.

Our methods in public services are perhaps worth mentioning. The zeal and self-denial of members will go for little if these are inapt. The morning service, then, had to be re-cast. Liturgy and chants had to depart without notice given. If any portion of these had been preserved, it might have served as the thin end of the wedge. So all went at once. It was painful ; but the original order and form did not consort with the changed needs of the neighbourhood. We lost

members through its dismissal, yet our gain was more than twenty times our loss. We substituted something suitable for the working classes. As it is always difficult for them to get in a morning, they were told that if they came in half an hour or more after worship had commenced it would be all right. There has been no pandering to irregularity, but the "long prayer" is put off until the end of the first thirty minutes. This has answered well. The morning is the "building-up time." Sloppy talk will not suffice; nor will it do to deal out such geography as did the Lancashire local-preacher, when he told his hearers that the river Jordan, at the place where the Israelites crossed it, is six miles in diameter, and twelve miles in circumference. Every discourse is thoroughly prepared, and is all the more appreciated. We use the Wesleyan Hymn-book. The organ and choir sometimes lead the congregation, and at other times are led by it, so full-voiced is the singing. At night it is positively "roof-lifting." The singers around me—augmented in number to between thirty and forty—with the organist in full sympathy with the work in hand, throw an abundance of "soul" into the Sankey's hymns which we then use. The sermon lasts half an hour: five minutes shorter than that of the morning. It is as thoughtfully put together as the earlier one, but has to be more spiced and seasoned. The strain of preaching on one small collection of topics is severe. After an hour and a quarter we go into an after-meeting, to which the bulk of the audience stay, and at which the praying men come to the front, after the provincial manner.

In the preaching my great aim is to help the Divine Spirit to produce conviction of sin among the ungodly. In modern gospelling this element is too much left out. The model sermon is understood to be "sweet" as well as short. "Come and spend a pleasant hour" is the invitation. Some who have come inside our chapel have spent a particularly unpleasant hour, for their sinfulness has been mapped out before their eyes. The purveyors of tea proclaim that "they use the utmost possible pressure to push up the quality and push down the price." That is avowedly followed by persons who are pleased to term themselves *Gospel* preachers. "Believe and be saved!" they cry. No repentance is demanded. But if the price is pushed down to nothing, does not the quality go down with it? *Can* we be *Gospel* preachers if we are not *Law* preachers?

All the other doctrines of the orthodox school have been harped upon. A wiseacre avers that "late and sad to most men is the coming of the knowledge of their own mind and of their own *real* opinions." If that is a fact, it is a poor lookout for some of us. If, until we reach life's meridian, our own beliefs are but partially formed, how shall we push them home upon our hearers? If we do not truly know our own minds, how shall we lead into a new life those who listen to us? For a long time there has been in me a deepening conviction that if the orthodox dogmas will not accomplish the renovation of the Individual and of the Race, it is not of much avail to try any others. An aged clergyman had given a dinner of high-class cookery and champagne to a clerical novice. At its close he turned to his guest with, "Young man, take my advice ; stick to orthodoxy!" The youth answered with gusto, "Indeed, sir, I will, if it provides dinners like these." But what are called the old Puritanical doctrines are worth holding by for reasons very diverse from those pleaded by the fledgeling aforesaid. Look at the effects which succeed their proclamation. The offence of the sinner in his rebellion against God's laws and God Himself is pungently and pathetically unfolded. Some stamp with annoyance and say, "This is the most insulting preacher I ever heard ; and yet, somehow, I can't help liking him." Some drop away from attendance ; if not saved, they have been scared. They felt they had either to serve God, or be very unhappy, or cease to listen to so searching a message. But God's mercy has been lovingly pourtrayed. A little girl told her mother, "I do so like to go to that God's love chapel." Still, the love of God and His mercy have not been severed from His holiness and justice. All have been set forth as meeting in Christ. There has been no scolding in mentioning the justice. One of the best men I ever met spoiled his ministry by his harshness. We may be faithful without indulging in rasping speech. Nor has there been any whining in talking of the love. *That* never does with working men ; nor will a "washy, weak, and everlasting flood" suit them. To grip with the first half-dozen sentences ; to inculcate self-knowledge, self-humiliation, self-surrender to Christ ; to represent Him as crucified before their very eyes, and for their iniquities ; to digest and dress up books like Dr. Pope's Compendium, in such a way as to produce a sense of the nearness of the Living

Jesus ; to have a free, manly, striking, illustrative manner—these have been my great designs. What matter if some *are* offended ? It is human pride which revolts against the accusation of wrongdoing and guilty omission ; and are we to truckle to that ? An old man in the north used to say, “ I’m only a little ‘un, but I never saw a man yet that was bigger than myself.” He needed taking down several pegs, and so do most of us. Men may resist the imputation of demerit and the threatening of penalty ; but in what other way can they be made to see their need of the sinner’s Friend ? W. E. Forster’s biographer says of him that “ he thought it his duty to bring about the results of Christianity without preaching its doctrines ; ” as if the results *could* be brought about without these staple teachings of the faith. Certainly, if these had been left out, we could not have seen what we have at St. John’s Square, Clerkenwell.

Our Mission has been regarded with disfavour in some directions, because of its having been understood as old-fashioned. This term will apply to open-air preaching and singing. Without any hint from me a lamp has been taken into the space in front, and, even on bitterly cold nights, a band of speakers and singers have clustered around it. Too much importance may easily be attached to this method of reaching the forgetters of God. With some it is a mania—as if open-air addresses were the one panacea for the ills of Londoners. With us, however, new effects of these outside services are constantly cropping up.

Tract work is old-fashioned. Its success has been lessened by the indiscreet and watery effusions that go to make up many of these missives. “ Anybody who can sign his or her initials can write a tract ” seems to be the current notion,—whereas nothing requires more knowledge of human nature and more skill in using that knowledge. The sailors complain that the leaflets dealt out to them are written for old ladies ashore—so absurd are they in their stringing together of nautical phrases—and landsmen might allege, with equal truth, that the composers of the poor stuff handed to them were very much “ at sea ” when they were concocting it. “ Highly sugared,” “ Betraying gross ignorance of the working-man’s home ”—comments like these might be plentifully jotted down. Can we be surprised that these printed sheets are turned

into pipe-lights? Considering that we have dispensed so many hundreds of thousands of tracts among the general public, I am astonished that we have not to hand a longer roll of direct results. The blessing of this work is mainly in the following up. The tract secures an introduction. Reports of likely families are handed in to my colleague and myself, and we quickly prospect on that ground. Quantities of persons now joining with us at the ordinances of religion were first got hold of in this way.

Bible Classes are old-fashioned. I cannot speak too highly of our Women's Bible Class and its teacher. Personally, I have charge, each Sabbath afternoon, of a class of men. Topics are carefully chosen. Interest and instruction are studied. Repartee, good-humour, smart sayings, display of general information, all are pleasing features of that Conversational Class. There is no reading in turn. It goes at haphazard,—for some of the members are poor scholars, and do not like being made a spectacle of before their fellows. The line of thought is dictated on the Sunday previous, so that the men may get posted up. Never do I get such brain-practice as during that one hour. The time has passed almost before it has begun, for all of us enjoy it exceedingly. There is the ripple of laughter at a shrewd retort or observation; or the discussions get into a strain of experience; or a vote is taken as between contending opinions. To many a man this class has been the savour of life unto life.

It is old-fashioned to honour the table of the Lord. I hear of a minister saying, "If you go to Sacrament once in six months that is ample." That is not good enough for us, for our sacramental seasons are festive as well as solemn. The unity of the brotherhood, as there manifested, is felt and rejoiced in. The meaning of the symbols is thoughtfully perceived. Between and during the tables sparkling melodies are started. No one is conscious of any dragging, for no flatness is allowed. It is more exhausting to the conductor and dispenser than *two* ordinary services; but I am persuaded that we approach very nearly to the early style of Sacrament-taking in our mixing of meditation with cheerfulness, of formal speech with glad psalmody. Our members, and others beside them, do not stay so much from a sense of what is appropriate as from a relish for the ordinance and its accompaniments. At

this table seekers after God have been comforted, and others who did not feel fit to partake have stayed to witness, and have quietly walked into the inquiry-room. Hallowed ecstasy has been mine as, on taking round the bread and wine, faces have suggested *such* histories. None but a true pastor knows a pastor's load, and none but he knows a pastor's joy. That joy reaches its highest point when he sees there those who, not long before, neither feared God nor regarded man, but who are now accepting with humble devotion the memorials of the Saviour's death. If I could choose the companion memory of my dying hours, I should fix upon the remembrance of a Central London Sacrament.

The Lovefeast is old-fashioned. In some circuits it is flickering out. Dry, windy speakers have helped to kill it. In dealing with persons of this description we have no squeamishness. Let them begin to spoil our Lovefeasts with their vapid talk and old-world tales, and they are stopped or sung down. Present experience, brevity, snatches of song—these are the "points" of this peculiarly Methodist institution as it is honoured at St. John's Square; and many date their conversion from the evening when they listened to the testimony of some scores of the lovers of Jesus. The witnessing has done what the preaching has failed to do.

It is old-fashioned to keep up Class Meetings, Leaders' Meetings, Teachers' Meetings, and other meetings distinctively religious, and of both major and minor importance; but this has been our custom. Thereby all have felt that ours is no one-man machine, but that its workings are of interest to everybody.

So well have these old-fashioned methods been worked that there has been no need for "Mission Services." Any arrangement of the kind would have done us ultimately more harm than good. We did try a Temperance Mission; but, though we had a first-rate agent, and did not spare expense, its results were little more than *nil*, and we turned to our former paths of steady toil with more confidence than ever.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR METHODS; SOCIAL.

ON all sides new-fashioned notions are being promulgated and brought into operation in evangelistic work. They have a tendency to crowd out the others. It is needful that they should be calmly and impartially considered. A gentleman of pronounced political leanings meets me with, "Do you not reach the working men by connecting yourself with their politics?" "No, indeed! they would respect me less if I did." Besides they have been flattered too much by both parties lately; and if *I* as a Christian minister joined in the flattery, I should be conspiring against that Gospel which works toward personal humility. Working men may get too conceited.

"Amuse and pauperize." Another sovereign remedy! But if the amusements begin, where are they to stop? An inventor had as his visitor a mischievous boy. Said boy found a big wheel of peculiar make, began careering about on this wheel, and got a bad fall. "Take my advice, my lad," quoth the inventor, "and never set in motion forces that you can't control." Certain religious caterers would be wise if they took this counsel to themselves. Nothing is more fraught with peril to the Church than the one-sided talk of well-meaning theorists. If untried nostrums are not swallowed, and suggestions about social methods are not entered upon, some of them become petulant and jaundiced, and brand those who hold aloof as reactionaries. It is hard to repress a feeling of indignation toward such "amuse and pauperize" folk. These apostles of the new social Gospel point to musical services, and clubs, and parlours, and soup kitchens, and medical missions, and,

with upturned eyes, together with an air of infinite superiority, exclaim, "Now, *at length*, we are beginning to set forth the Christianity of Christ." What an unfair reflection on those godly methods in which Christians have so long believed and so selflessly laboured! Loving visits at the homes of the poor; voice broken with outdoor straining; plodding, prosaic, prayerful hours spent in heated rooms—and all this goes for little or nothing. "Now, *at length!*"—never before, be it understood—"we are beginning to set forth the true Spirit of Christ. We have forgotten that men have bodies as well as souls. To care for the soul and neglect the body is a mockery." But is this thought for the bodies of men such a novelty? We have some faint memory of deeds of mercy and charity on the part of those who had schooled themselves to put first and last the salvation of the soul. Have they bestowed no money, these "evangelicals," towards the alleviation of physical suffering and the energizing of the mental life?

Yes! many pretty theories are abroad. No flaw can be detected in them. Frederick the Great, before he was king, had some theories about kingship which were equally flawless; but, when the crown came to him, he found that they broke down. To bring into practice some of the specious ideals which now prevail is about as impossible as to wash the skin without getting wet.

We cannot but suspect some of the sources whence these theories come. Clergymen and ministers on whose souls the great doctrines of the Cross have no grip, who have failed to attract congregations and to increase membership by more sober methods, find in the new-fangled proposals a convenient refuge. Laymen who are void of spirituality, whose faces are never seen at a devotional meeting, are glad to contribute a five-pound note toward some gilded scheme, and to talk it up with airy platitudes and upstirrings of cheap sentiment. Paid agents and persons who use, as a leverage for money-getting, the word "unsectarian" with great effect, find it so pleasant to act the part of Lord and Lady Bountiful, and to avoid the humdrum tasks of ordinary soul-winning. In addition to these there are sincere and earnest followers of Jesus who, having never been privileged to see the social changes wrought by a great work of God, are led to accept as Gospel pretentious

articles and speeches, and to unpack, publicly and privately, their budget of second-hand ideas.

All this derives fresh strength from the support it gets from secular and heterodox editors. These gentlemen understand it to mean the failure of those cardinal dogmas, of that "blood-theology" and belief in prayer, which are pilloried by them as effete superstitions. Unitarians and so-called "broad thinkers" find the adoption of these social plans highly agreeable to their palates. They exclaim, "After all this chatter about the 'grand old Gospel,' the orthodox are compelled to fall back on those means upon which we have chiefly relied. Have we not called our centres 'Domestic Missions'? Have we not sought the cleansing of the home and strengthening of the character with music, dancing, and general humanitarianism as our chosen vehicles?" So that it appears that these systems—at the opposite end of the diameter from ourselves—are bolstered up by our tacit surrender of past positions. Has it come to this—that soul-saving work must take a back seat? That ministers and Church officials must become patrons of dancing clubs, and presidents of political debating societies?

The "open every night" theory is obtruded everywhere. Never mind by how much the working expenses are increased, or how difficult it is to raise the money by which to meet the swollen bills; do not consider the tax entailed upon the leading workers by the addition of multiform details; do not care for the remonstrance of the wife—based, though she knows it not, upon that New Testament which upholds and sanctions the duties of home—that "since her husband has got among these religious people he's off as soon as he's had his meals, and is less in the house than he was before;" the premises must either be open every night, or the delinquent authorities must expect the sarcasms and anathemas of the secularizing party in the churches.

With thorough fair-mindedness I resolved that all social methods within reason and reach should be employed. We have had opportunities of testing them all but unique; and influential members of the Committee whose servant I am strongly favoured an expenditure of time and money in their out-working. I have no desire to lower the estimate formed of some of these methods, but am wishful that managers of

Missions and others should not be betrayed into expecting too much from them.

Throughout two winters we have had "Pleasant Evenings for the People;" and during all the three years, for terms of eight or nine months, Temperance meetings. Last winter we formed a City Men's Reunion. We have tried Slate Club, Reading Room, Girls' Parlour, Band, Singing Class; in fact, a week at St. John's Square, when we were in full swing, meant more than fifty meetings of one kind and another. Some of our organizations have succeeded, while some have failed. The failures shall be told, even as are the successes. Suppression of facts anent social failures is too common. Men are afraid of the stigma which any announcement of a breakdown may bring. Exceptional achievements are gleefully chronicled, while the special and favouring conditions which accounted for them are not noted. As a result, false hopes are formed, and expensive arrangements are made in places where these conditions are not present. Now much disaster and heartache might have been spared if only the *whole* truth had been candidly told. Nothing is gained when candour is thrown overboard. Candour would not be less incumbent upon me, if even our Mission had *not* been sufficiently successful to bear, without damage, a heavy record of failure.

The Pleasant Evenings for the People were arranged with the idea of sandwiching the educational between the interesting, the sacred between the secular. In this we were fairly satisfied. The lecture came as a grateful change from the music, and the sacred concert was the better enjoyed after the sentimental melodies of the preceding week. At the first, this was hardly the case, but we persisted in refusing to yield to low tastes. The scientific nights improved as we went on, until, even then, we had about five hundred persons, big and little, wedged into the room. The musical evenings were always the greatest "draw," and, it must be confessed, the least healthy songs were often the most loudly applauded. That there have been good effects produced there can be no doubt. Neglecters of public worship were lured into these gatherings. Their prejudices quickly died down. They liked the people, the place, and those at the head of affairs better than they thought they would. Some had had a secret longing for some time to attend religious services, but, from shyness or fear of ridicule, they felt

the leap too great. A half-way halting-place came in well for them. The transition from the old way of doing things was less abrupt. And good was done in the bringing together of all classes. The artisans and the parties below them saw that the genteel classes had a deep interest in their welfare—and, by this conviction, they were bettered. These genteel friends, in their turn, after having heard the laughter and loud clapping of their auditors, went away glowing with pleasure, and remarking one to another, "Now, this is something like—isn't it? This is *practical* goodness if you please. We have kept some out of mischief, and made all happier." Generally there has been the request to be allowed to come again and cater for so appreciative an assembly. By the watchful working into this of our other agencies, some who had no intention of resuming attendance on public worship have been brought again into the way of it. The Monday "*Pleasant Evening*" has been a stepping-stone to the Sunday's services; and, when in the spring-time the series was finished, we lost touch of some men and women who showed signs of becoming attached to us.

But other data have to be considered. There is a contra account. More than once we were let down. Beggars cannot be choosers, and, as all the help given was voluntary, we could not scan and alter the programme as we would. Songs that smacked of the music-hall were rendered and joined in, and the appetite for catchy nonsense was whetted thereby. One such performance threw back seriously the educational process, and opened the door to cavillers. The prayer at the beginning was then thought of as incongruous, and the benediction at the close sounded rather farcical. It was well known that neither the friend who was at my right hand in getting up each series nor myself was pleased with this dropping of the tone, but there was a lingering sense of pain in the spiritually minded frequenters of the evenings for some time afterwards. Singing or acting in character, anything that might foster a liking for spectacular plays, has been unflinchingly suppressed, but there is no telling how soon these and other abuses might creep in if the restraining hand were not firm and tight.

During this social season our religious meetings suffered. There were fewer at the classes, prayer-meeting, and week-evening service. The Pleasant Evening was preferred by the younger and by some of the older people. Some who have

broken off have not been tacked on again without great care. The attention of our workers was distracted from direct labour for souls. The evenings cost time, trouble, and thought, that might have been otherwise usefully spent. They paid their monetary costs, but that was the smallest item of expense. Though our model was of the best, we partly defeated our own ends, through being hindered along other lines of toil.

Our Pleasant Evenings, as to title and pattern, have been widely imitated ; and I sometimes tremble at the responsibility we have incurred by setting the example. Have we, after all, been letting out the winds that will uproot and destroy much that is good ? None of those who have best supported me are enthusiastic about the *nett* result. In the gross it looked considerable ; but experience suggests extensive subtractions ; and inquiries somewhat elaborate have forced upon me the conclusion that, where the facilities for working this method have been fewer and the agents less careful, the balance of treasured result is small. If any workers for the people are inclined to view this as a short and easy way of capturing them for Christ, they may as well divest themselves of any such theory.

On the first Saturday in each month, the young City men have come together for tea and social enjoyment. A happy moral atmosphere has been created. Selectness has been preserved both in the company and the choice of pieces. All have departed with a consciousness of profit as well as pleasure. But good steering has been needed, or sunken reefs would have been run upon.

It is the same with the Temperance Meeting held every Saturday night. The topic is so threadbare, and it is almost out of the question to procure good and attractive speakers every week ; so the speaking ought to be mixed with crisp dialogue, brisk melodies, bright recitations ; and this requires dexterity and resource. Temperance work may be utterly spoiled by frivolous songs and silly actings. But our meeting has served a good purpose, and encouraging results are quotable.

In the use of Social Methods carefulness cannot be dispensed with. The dependence upon the social for the creation of the religious is not commendable. In many churches the introduction of the secular has meant the swamping of the spiritual. Constitute first a strong spiritual stream, and jealously keep everything secondary to that.

The Reading-room may be spoken of with freedom. It was away from the Chapel, was highly rented, neatly furnished, had abundance of good literature, and chess, draughts, dominoes, in addition. Behind the large room a snuggery was fitted up and adorned in order that the men might go there to smoke if they were so inclined. A strong committee of godly working men was formed, and they attended in relays from seven to ten o'clock each night. The streets and blocks were well billed, and the room broadly advertised on the Chapel hoarding. It was called "The Pleasant Hour," in the hope that this would render it the more popular. A lamp was fixed over the entrance. There was no charge for membership, though a box for contributions was placed just within the door. It was, for some months, as well attended as any Reading-room under religious patronage that I have ever been acquainted with. The results, however, were not adequate to the expenditure, and after twelve months' tenure it was shut up. The men we wanted did not come in sufficient numbers, partly because they thought we sought to get our meshes around them, partly because no sporting papers were on the tables. And, as in Central London the instinct which leads men to get into the open air is very powerful, it came to pass, that the advent of summer weather caused the absence of the old *habitués*. On the return of winter we could not crane the thing up to its previous position. The break had given the room a deadly blow. Abuses introduced themselves, and one or two disturbances occurred. The chess-players were helped by a competent teacher, and the first thing they did after some skill was attained was to betake themselves to a chess club where drink was sold. The members of the committee tired of a thankless and wearisome engagement. Expenses were not light, and contributions from the members were scarce. It seemed better to close the Reading-room than to use money for so poor a recompense. Of another which is kept up by a church of the Establishment, this was told me by one who knew. "There's a bagatelle board there. A lot of 'ikeys' (rough hulking youths) get in when they haven't money enough to go to the penny gaff. They drive the genuine working men away. They only use the place as a make-shift, and then jeer at those who allow them to come. As for church, they are never seen inside it." Not a solitary religious

Reading-room can I hear of that has tangible success to report. If there has been a large accession of working men, and they wish to club together for mutual helpfulness, the ground is more favourable; but, as a rule, Christian philanthropists ought to be chary of starting these institutions. Good motive is not always an excuse for slowness in learning practical lessons, and for refusal to accept the results of past ventures. For one, I should think for a long while before initiating another Reading-room.

We tried a Girls' Parlour. Every convenience was obtained. Ladies, to whom lasting gratitude is due, came in from the suburbs. A local committee was formed. But the thing did not work. The decent girls would not company with the wild ones, and these did not want to be improved. Sewing was not liked; larking was preferred. The visitors from a distance were compelled to be irregular, and supplies could not be obtained. The nightly burden upon a few became out of all reason. Reluctantly enough, comparative failure had to be admitted. The causes were not far to seek. Patchwork will never do, unless there is a settled lady-worker, paid or unpaid, to make it her hobby and life-aim to fill up gaps and to keep things together. To overwork those whose spare time is limited is unwise. They go out on strike at last. It is not every church that can bear the financial pressure for agents separated wholly from worldly pursuits, that they may concentrate themselves on such chosen spheres as Girls' Parlours. If even they have no salary—keep, housing, and incidentals mount up.

The more of the social we adopt the more paid agents must be called out. Is this feasible, unless to an extravagant mission or a wealthy congregation? We hail the coming into contact of the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate; but, generally, any contrivance with this object means enlarged claims upon an exchequer kept low by many other claims.

Our Slate Club hung fire for the first two years. Thinking that this title suggested beer and tobacco smoke we named it "Thrift Society" to begin with. The name was too lofty, so it was changed as above. Then the Club doubled its membership. Its rules were most carefully compiled. Cost of working and risk were reduced to a minimum. We have been fortunate

in our Secretary and other officers. Asked whether, on the whole, I thought it worth the trouble, the reply I gave was, "Yes, it is worth the trouble, if it only helps to unite our people." But it has done more than that ; it has opened a new field for our energies, and, though we have not netted by it all we hoped, the gains have made us thankful.

We fell into the common error of having too many irons in the fire, of endeavouring to cover too much ground. A Singing Class was attempted. Our best workers were otherwise engaged, and the attempt lacked backbone. It did not pay for the conductor's time, and was allowed to fall through. The Reed and String Band is our youngest child. It has been of service at more than one contingency. We have a nucleus of players who would become most helpful if we could give them more scope for the display of their powers. On sounding upon this matter certain ministerial brethren who have had experience of bands, I found that they had modified greatly their earlier opinions, and were not at all positive in their recommendation of bands. They intimated that accordant music was produced by the fingers and lips of those who were prone to become discordant people. More need not be said.

Soup-kitchen, Medical Mission, Old-clothes Shop, we never established, though, privately, and with much sifting of cases, many benefits have been handed about. The worst of these things is that it is the improvident and drunken who mostly profit by them. They think it a pity to spend upon food, and medicine, and clothing, when by a little scheming they can get them for nothing. There is no knowledge more painful than that which comes from intimacy with the tricks of London.

We have not had a Coffee Bar. Private venture Bars, whose standard is high, have arisen everywhere. Nor do those under the direction of religious bodies justify their existence. Their management produces awkward complications. Nineteen times out of twenty there is a dead loss on the transaction. Only the slightest and most intangible results accrue. If such an agency as this happens to score a success much is made of it, and the Christian public rushes at the idea that it may be indefinitely repeated. "Look before you leap" is a proverb which is nowhere more appropriate than it is here.

As things are, we shall expect a new crop of social experiments every year. We are only afraid that steady-going

Christians will neglect the plainer paths of usefulness, and run with the faddists to invest in novelties. Social Christianity, with all its crotchetts, is chiefly laudable when regarded as expressive of the restless versatile ardour of the advocates of religion.

CHAPTER XII.

A N INTERVIEW.

AND why not? If report speaks truly, some of the interviews published, as between the representatives of well-known papers and men famous in the political or religious world, never took place. The description of the study, the piling up of the preliminaries, the consecution of question and answer, all came from the imagination and pen of the gentleman who was supposed to be "interviewed."

My questioner, then, is an imaginary personage, and all introductory and complimentary remarks may be dispensed with. We proceed to business at once.

I. I am not sure that I have fully grasped your idea in sending forth this record of Mission Work. I have read the manuscript carefully, but don't catch your drift.

E.S. That is *my* fault! But no room shall be left now for any misconception. Candidly, I am afraid of an Evangelistic reaction. Luther recoiled from salvation by works, and went off at a tangent into salvation by faith. In his hands this became the monopolist doctrine, and the Churches wouldn't stand it. The pendulum swung back, and went too far again toward works. In like manner, I am dreading the day when from all this noise and parade of agency—itself a reaction from the phlegmatic religion of twenty-five years ago—the religious sympathies of the evangelical bodies shall go back to modes and beliefs little better than deathly. If we took a leaf out of the book of the Secularists and Romanists and High Anglicans, if we worked with more subtlety and less trumpeting, it would prevent this setting back of the current. Hence this book.

I. Has this opinion of yours any special application to your own Church?

E.S. Rather! Instead of doing most of what we can do best, we are arrogating to ourselves a many-sidedness which God never intended us to possess. We have too many schemes in the air, are being led off on side-paths, are currying favour with the sentimentalists. We are not cutting our garment according to our cloth. Our none too wealthy adherents are pestered with appeals for money for many visionary objects, or objects which do not dovetail into the genius of Methodism. She *can* savingly influence the working millions. If some one does not do this it will soon be too late. Let them be but brought into contact with such bright phases of Christianity as Methodism can best supply, and they can be saved by the ten thousand. I repeat, Let Methodism do most of what she can do best.

I. Do you put down your success to any extraordinary fitness on your own part?

E.S. God had been inwardly preparing me for a long time. I did not realize this then, but do now. From boyhood I have studied every military book at all accessible; and, latterly, have gone thoroughly into the art of captaincy. In me the military passion is sanctified. More than this, stores of Biblical lore had been slowly accumulated in the prayerful hope that my Master would allow me some day to lead up in the practical enunciation of great Evangelistic principles. But all that I have done has been accomplished by a minister of another, but not a lower, caste—by my friend, the Rev. J. G. Mantle of Birmingham, and that without the employment of anything social or secular.

I. But may not results be attributed to causes other than personal ones?

E.S. Undoubtedly! Divided responsibility is paralyzing our best ministers. The cut-and-dried Circuit methods are collapsing on all sides. We need a Conference Commission to simplify our financial and ministerial system. It is said that we have *worked Methodism* at St. John's Square. So we have; and a cumbrous matter it has been, as to *some* portions of Methodist requirement. I should be very sorry if anything said by me would help to perpetuate any unwieldy customs. Of other customs it may be roundly affirmed that their admirable

character was never more practically borne out than in our work. We need to adapt our regulations so as to meet the rapidly altering needs of national life. Of some obnoxious parts of this system I have been mercifully relieved. Had all the usages and changes of a Methodist Circuit been laid upon me, I should have turned my back on the place in six months.

I. Is it *all* advantage in a Mission as distinct from a Circuit?

E.S. No! One is infested with notionists and fanatics; and petitions for or against this, that, and the other; and distributors of bills which have as their design the unsettling of our crude material; and critics who "want to show you how to do it better—you know." All this, though, is far outweighed by the gifts sent and the prayers put up by a sympathetic religious public.

I. Would you recommend fewer Circuits and more Missions?

E.S. Scarcely that! If all the strongest men are taken to Missions (and that is the tendency at present), the Circuits will suffer; the bird that lays the golden eggs will be *not* killed outright, but certainly kept on short commons. Then the eggs will be fewer and smaller, and the Missions will get less support from the Circuits on which they depend. I would rather dictate a policy of modification in Circuits. Let there be more pastoral concentration. Payment by results we can never have; but it is very hard for an earnest minister when he is let down by cold or lackadaisical colleagues. *His* work stagnates through their remissness, and *they* hide their failure behind his zealous efforts. Let individuality count for more than it does, and, when men will not do their duty, let there be ways and means of making it known, and of making them suffer. If something like this is not resolved upon soon the cry for Missions will become shriller and more widely spread than it ought to be.

I. But do not your methods smack too much of hammer and tongs?

E.S. That we cannot do without hammer and tongs you will admit; and there *is* such a thing as skill in wielding these tools, be it remembered. But I think we have shown much flexibility and great willingness to learn from experience.

I. I said what I did because of the seemingly hard tone of your dicta about social methods, even when they are guided by religion.

E.S. There was no intentional hardness. All that I wished was to advise watchfulness and moderation in their use. Their very advocates will surely admit that.

I. But it seems to me you are hopeless about the criminal and debased and flaccid of the people.

E.S. I am fairly beaten by the problem, and agree with those who think that more ought to be left to the State. We may expect too much from Government. One old lady in America lost her umbrella and applied to the Government offices to find her another. But the Church has been doing the State's work as well as her own, and has done her own the worse therefore. And as long as she will do it she may. Look at the criminal classes. Lord Cockburn said that he lost all expectation of a man's recovery after his second conviction. I would not go as far as that, but the odds against recovery in any given case are tremendous. It behoves the State to legislate on their behalf. Neither am I severe with the drooping poor. Napier used to express a wish that, when he died, the poor would regret him;—and I am sure that when my term of service is over hundreds of them will regret me. But find most of them work to do, and how much of it would get through their fingers? After all said and done they are just incompetent, and can only be dealt with by State measures. The Church cannot afford on a large scale that tedious course of training by which alone hereditary ills can be weeded out and a spinal cord of character can be manufactured. Oh that she would study more the parable of the sower!

I. To what extent has your Mission sensibly affected the hordes of souls around you?

E.S. We have touched the fringe, nibbled at the problem, and no more.

I. And is there no possibility of farther advance?

E.S. Doors are opening to us at every point of the compass. There are possibilities among policemen, labouring people of all varieties, young City men. I have only fulfilled the first part of my programme, and we are sorely straightened for room. My best coadjutors are, like myself, in life's prime. My church is all nerve and sinew. And yet we are come to a full stop! Scores stay away on Sunday evenings because of the insufferable heat. The workers have slackened speed. As

far as one can see one of the grandest opportunities a church ever had is about to be lost. Hundreds who would come to a larger place will not attend our present chapel. The inconveniences are too great.

I. You speak of a larger place : why not lessen the congestion by a ring of mission-rooms ?

E.S. For several reasons. First, in the district defined as ours, neither rooms nor sites for them can be found. Second, if they could be hit upon the cost would be enormous. Then, if built, they would take away a score or two of our best workers, and we should suffer at St. John's to that extent. But is it to be expected that the rest would leave a springy, go-ahead service such as ours is to attend a mission-room ? Everything would seem so tame, and they'd wish themselves back among the thousand at the Square. Nor would the results pay for the price laid down. Mission-halls are very well where the chapel or church is prosy and superfine, and where the fiery hearts need an outlet. But with us things are of another type, and we do not want the interest dividing between place and place.

I. Then I may be allowed to surmise, from what I know of you, that unless extension be made possible you will not stay at your present appointment ?

E.S. Precisely so. But it will be harrowing to myself to have to leave my flock. Gladly would I stay on, if any prospects of proper extension were afforded. As long as *I* am there, our hard workers will expect great returns, and they cannot have them with the present deadlock. Besides, I dare not give any more of my time to these premises. Pledged at the beginning to do my best, I have devoted three and a half of life's best years to the filling of this chapel, and the solidification of the work ; and it would be adverse to every rule of religious economy to give more. No man could wish for a finer field than Central London. Upon no man could a higher honour be placed than to be commissioned to lead up there ; but I cannot consent to be the minister of a cause that can do little more than hold its own.

I. You mentioned just now a more extended programme, if adequate means were only provided. May I trouble you to state some of its items ?

E.S. More would have to be done for the City houses. A

'young man told me that among two hundred hands in one of these only one had taken upon himself the name of Christ, and, said he : " I'm the second, but no one takes any interest in us. Most of us have come up from the country, with our Bibles, and with the custom of kneeling down at night ; but it's soon all dropped, and we go a bad way." What a field for an intelligent agent working towards a great centre, and with our budding Re-union bursting into full flower !

Any large place—call it "hall," or "tabernacle," or what you will—would come in for many purposes, Methodist, undenominational, social, and would be a boon indeed to all philanthropists who desire to mitigate evil and to spread good in Central London.

In three years we might have a church of twelve or fifteen hundred, with many ramifications and out-branchings, presenting a strong, pugnacious front to every class of negativism and malevolence. God has given the neighbourhood very much into our hands, and with the likelihood of a thousand scholars in our schools ; a Benefit Society which should checkmate the publican ; Social and Musical and Temperance gatherings which should become famous along the radius of at least a mile ; all the victories that must arise from our having gained the ear and confidence of this thickly peopled part of London ; it is heart-breaking to have to turn hopelessly away.

I. Why so hopeless ?

E.S. The constituency of givers to which our steady-going methods appeal are the very people who are doing all but their best for the ordinary work of their own Circuits and of the Connexion. Several tests have proved that we cannot expect much from them. Others, in reply to all requests for help in commonplace Christian effort, tighten their purse-strings, but loosen them without much inquiry when appealed to by anything uncommon, and have no margin left for us. Funds that *might* reach us are intercepted by greedy claimants. It will be same next year, and the year after, and so, like Paul, I have to say that " I have no more place in these parts."

I. Tell me, if you will, in what respects you are *not* satisfied with results.

E.S. I had hoped for the bringing in of persons badly impregnated with socialism and infidelity. This has not happened to an extent sufficient for jubilation. Nor have

we had so many thick-and-thin supporters of Satan brought to penitence and prayer as I would fain have seen. Nor are the young people quite so careful to avoid romping near the chapel premises and to go home from the meetings at a proper time as I could desire. Nor is there the willingness I should like to see manifested on the part of some of our friends to present their children publicly to God. And so one might go on adding to the catalogue of deficiencies ; but, when placed opposite the excellencies and in comparison with other churches, what do they amount to ?

I. You have said much in your book about workers. How have they been kept together ?

E.S. By a Mission Band tea meeting every Sunday ; by other tea meetings, and consultation meetings at various times ; by the active thought shown in the separate work of each, and the assurance given that kindly eyes were upon them as they went their round of aggressive duty.

I. You spoke of a deserted gallery. How were the people induced to occupy it ?

E.S. The one to whom this little work is dedicated went up herself, taking our children with her ; then a dozen more followed ; then two dozen ; then four, until the glut downstairs was transferred upstairs. The gallery now is the most crowded part of the house.

I. I may infer, then, that you have not been led to give up the views by which you were possessed three years since ?

E.S. On the contrary, they hold me more firmly than ever. But from all controversy I turn with impatience, exclaiming, with my favourite poet :—

“ It is enough to be nor question why ;
It is enough to work my work and die ;
It is enough to feel and not to know ;
Behold, the dawn is breaking—let me go.”

End of Interview.

Christian ! work ; I pray thee, work ! Do not wait till the humour seizes thee or the fit comes upon thee. Work ! and, before thou knowest, the fit *will* have come upon thee, the humour *will* have seized thee.

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